

1207
S E R M O N S

ON

PRACTICAL SUBJECTS,

BY THE LATE REVEREND

HENRY STEBBING, D.D.

PREACHER TO THE HONOURABLE SOCIETY
OF GRAY'S-INN,

CHAPLAIN IN ORDINARY TO HIS MAJESTY,

AND

FELLOW OF THE ROYAL AND ANTIQUARIAN
SOCIETIES.

V O L. III.

L O N D O N:

PRINTED FOR C. DILLY, IN THE POULTRY.

84
M.DCC.XC.

9

S E R M O N S

OF

PRACTICAL SUBJECTS

BY THE REV. JAMES HENDERSON

HEMING D.D.



PRINTED BY J. JOHNSON, ST. PAULS CHURCH-YARD

CHARTERED BY THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

PRINTED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

1840

—

WOLF. H.

—

LONDON

PRINTED FOR C. WHITTAKER, IN THE LANCET

1840

C O N T E N T S

OF THE

T H I R D V O L U M E.

S E R M O N LXXX.

On Private Prayer,

MATTH. vi. 6. *But thou, when thou prayest,
enter into thy closet.* p. 1.

S E R M O N LXXXI.

Christ's Manner of Life an Example for our
Imitation.

MATTH. xi. 29. *Learn of me, for I am
meek and lowly* p. 13.

VOL. III.

SERMON

iv CONTENTS.

SERMON LXXXII.

On Providence.

PSALM ciii. 19. *The Lord hath prepared his seat in heaven: his kingdom ruleth over all.* - p. 25.

SERMON LXXXIII.

The same Subject continued.

PSALM civ. 24. *O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all — the earth is full of thy riches.* p. 39.

SERMON LXXXIV.

The same Subject continued.

PSALM xxxiii. 13, 14. *The Lord looketh from heaven: he beboldeth all the sons of men. From the habitation of his dwelling he considereth all them that dwell on the earth; he fashioneth all the hearts of them, and understandeth all their works.* - p. 55.

SERMON

C O N T E N T S.

S E R M O N LXXXV.

The same Subject continued.

PSALM cxlv. 17, 18. *The Lord is righteous in all his ways—and is nigh unto all them that call upon him faithfully.* - p. 71.

S E R M O N LXXXVI.

The same Subject continued.

EZEK. xviii. 30. *I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord God.* - - p. 87.

S E R M O N LXXXVII.

On Diffimulation.

ROM. xii. 9. *Let love be without diffimulation.* - - - p. 103.

S E R M O N LXXXVIII.

The same Subject continued. p. 113.

vi CONTENTS.

SERMON LXXXIX.

The proper Method of giving Reproof.

MATTH vii. 5. *First cast out the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.* - - - p. 125.

SERMON XC.

The Gospel Duty of Forgiveness.

MATTH. xviii. 35. *So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.* - - - p. 137.

SERMON XCI.

The same Subject continued.

LUKE xvii. 3, 4. *If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent—thou shalt forgive him.* - - - p. 151.

SERMON

C O N T E N T S. vii

S E R M O N X C II.

The same Subject continued. p. 163.

S E R M O N X C III.

The same Subject continued. p. 173.

S E R M O N X C IV.

Beneyolence enforced, and Charity-Schools
vindicated : a Charity-Sermon.

I JOHN iv. 11. *Beloved, if God so loved us,
we ought also to love one another.* p. 185.

S E R M O N X C V.

On Christ's Resurrection.

ACTS x. 40, 41. *Him God raised up the
third day, and shewed him openly; not to
all the people, but unto witnesses chosen be-
fore of God* - - - p. 209.

viii **C O N T E N T S.**

S E R M O N XCVI.

**Christian Faith founded on reasonable
Evidence.**

I PET. iii. 15. *Be ready always to give an
answer to every man that asketh you a reason
of the hope that is in you.* - - - **p. 225.**

S E R M O N XCVII.

Necessity of reading the Scriptures.

PSALM CXIX. 105. *Thy word is a lamp un-
to my feet, and a light unto my path.* **p. 243.**

S E R M O N XCVIII.

**Considerations on God's Judgments, and the
proper Improvement of them pointed out.**

ISAIAH XXVI. 9. *When thy judgments are in
the earth, the inhabitants of the world will
learn righteousness.* - - - **p. 257.**

S E R M O N XCIX.

**The Obligations to Benevolence: a Charity-
Sermon.**

ROM. xiii. 8. *Owe no man any thing, but to
love one another.* - - - **p. 273.**

S E R M O N

CONTENTS. ix

SERMON C.

Obedience our best Security : a Thanksgiving
Sermon, for Peace.

ISAIAH i. 19, 20. *If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land :*

But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword : for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. - - - p. 289.

SERMON CI.

St. Paul's Argument against Fornication.

1 COR. vi. 18. *Flee Fornication.* p. 305.

SERMON CII.

The Duty of applying our worldly Advantages for the Good of others.

LUKE xvi. 8, 9. *The Lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely : for the children of this world are, in their generation, wiser than the children of light. And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness ; that, when*

CONTENTS.

when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations. — P. 325.

SERMON CIII.

**On Occasion of the Suppression of the Riots
in 1780.**

PSALM vii. 9 & seq. *Let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end, but establish the just.—God is angry with the wicked every day.—He hath also prepared for him the instruments of death.—Behold he travaileth with iniquity, and hath conceived mischief—But his mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down upon his own pate.* — P. 339.

SERMON CIV.

**Reflections on some Circumstances of Christ's
early Life.**

LUKE ii. 41. *Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year, at the feast of the pass-over.* — P. 349.

SERMON

C O N T E N T S.

S E R M O N CV.

Jonathan: or the Power of Friendship.

1 SAM. xviii. 1. *The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.* - p. 365.

S E R M O N CVI.

On the Person and Mission of Jesus Christ.

GAL. iv. 4, 5. *When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.* - p. 385.

S E R M O N CVII.

On the Ministry of John the Baptist.

MATT. iii. 1. *In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand* - - p. 395.

S E R M O N

CONTENTS.

SERMON CVIII.

The same Subject continued.

MATT. iii. 13. *Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan, unto John, to be baptized of him.* - - - P. 407.

SERMON CIX.

On the Ministry of Jesus Christ.

JOHN i. 17. *The law was given by Moses; but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.* P. 419.

SERMON CX.

Christ's Prediction of his Sufferings and Death.

JOHN xiii. 19. *Now I tell you before it come, that when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am he.* - - - P. 433.

SERMON CXI.

The Passion of our Saviour.

JOHN xii. 24. *Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit* P. 441.

SERMON

C O N T E N T S. xii

S E R M O N CXII.

On Anger.

EPHES. iv. 26. *Be ye angry, and sin not.*
P. 453.

S E R M O N CXIII.

The same Subject continued.

EPHES. iv. 26. *Be ye angry, and sin not; let
not the sun go down upon your wrath.*
P. 467.

S E R M O N CXIV.

On the Duty of Religious Reflection.

PSALM cxix. 59. *I thought on my ways, and
turned my feet unto thy statutes.* p. 481.

S E R M O N CXV.

The same Subject continued. p. 491.

SERMON

CONTENTS

SERMON CXII.

On Anger.

Text. iv. 26. Be ye angry, and be not
sinners. p. 473.

SERMON CXIII.

The same Subject continued.

Text. iv. 26. Be ye angry, and be not; let
the sun go down upon your wrath.
p. 467.

SERMON CXIV.

On the Duty of Religious Reflection.

Psalm cxix. 23. I thought on my ways, and
turned my feet unto thy statutes. p. 481.

SERMON CXV.

The same Subject continued. p. 491.

SERMON

S E R M O N LXXX.

ON PRIVATE PRAYER.

MATTHEW vi. 6.

*But thou, when thou prayest, enter into
thy closet.*

AFTER leaving the public prayers of the church, our first retirement is into our families, beyond which there is a farther retirement into our closet.

Our Saviour says—"When thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues, and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men:—but thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet."

The whole course of the advice, which our Saviour, in this chapter, is giving his disciples, upon almsgiving, prayer, and fast-

ing, as it is directed against the hypocritical performance of these duties, so it must be understood as recommending a sincere discharge of them. Every advice against the abuse of any thing, supposes the proper use of it; and our Saviour's advice against the hypocritical abuse of private prayer, not only supposes but recommends the proper use of it.

The particular wants, and the particular blessings, whether temporal or spiritual, which each man feels belonging to himself, require the duty of private prayer. Public prayer comprehends all conditions of men, but distinguishes none; yet each man is truly distinguishable from the rest by the particular share he has in the general dispensation of things. He feels his wants and blessings as his own, though thousands feel the like. His sins are truly his own, though thousands are guilty of the like: and, in the common dispensation of grace and pardon for sins, he feels his own particular need of both, distinct, though not different, from what others feel. There being then something particular, as well as general, in our nature and condition, the duty of prayer, which is founded on our condition, must have something particular as well as general in it: and therefore the method of using
it

it must be private as well as public ; because the public use of prayer being conducted, as it must needs be, in general forms, does not, alone, sufficiently answer the particular purposes belonging to the duty.

When we enter into our closets, it should be with a design of entering into our hearts ; to reflect seriously and strictly on our condition, and the several circumstances belonging to it. We are there not only to acknowledge the goodness of God, but to consider how we have been indebted to it, and to thank him for his particular as well as general blessings. We are not only to confess ourselves sinners, but to enquire what and how great sinners we are—to call our ways to remembrance, and reflect with strictness on the sins which most easily beset us, and on the temptations by which we have been most easily betrayed into them ; and not only resolve to avoid them, but consider by what proper steps we may effect it. These thoughts will naturally lead us, not only to ask for God's pardon and grace, but to apply for them in such circumstances particularly, where, upon a serious consideration of ourselves, we find we have a particular need of them.—This is our business when we retire into our closets ;

which cannot be performed in our public devotions, or but very imperfectly; for though public devotion may admit of transient reflections on ourselves as we go along, it will not allow of such stops as are necessary for consideration.

But let us take a nearer view of the efficacy and advantage attending private prayer.

The efficacy of prayer in general is to make us good; as it is the means, appointed by God, for our obtaining that assistance of his grace, by which alone we can become so.—But there is an effect arising from the use of private prayer, which has a peculiar tendency towards making and keeping us good; at least, it strikes us more forcibly in the closet than at church—I mean the sense of God's immediate presence and inspection over us.

We cannot indeed pray at church without a sense of God's presence and inspection, at least we pray very inattentively if we do; but then other objects are at hand to interrupt that sense: though we are before God, yet we are *in company* before him; and, I doubt, we often feel our behaviour more influenced by the company we are in, than by the majesty we are before.

But

But when we are on our knees in our closets, we are not only before God, but we are *alone with him*, and can fix our attention no where but on him and on ourselves. In this situation we are strongly possessed of the sense, that God sees what we are doing, hears what we are saying, and knows what we are thinking; and, by frequently putting ourselves in this situation, we not only feel such sense whilst we are at our prayers, but we retain it afterwards, and feel it as a guard upon our conduct, whenever we are alone; for, whoever habituates himself to the persuasion, that God sees him when he prays in private, will be hard put to it, if he endeavours to persuade himself, that God does not see him when he sins in private.

Such religious care of ourselves in the closet naturally leads to a good behaviour abroad. Out of the heart arise the issues both of life and death, of our good and of our bad actions; and, though vice is brought to maturity in public, it is conceived and nurtured in private. To keep the heart then with all diligence, is our first and principal care; and the method, which is the most effectual for keeping the heart, deserves our first and most constant attention.

This method is private devotion ; which, as it fills the heart with a sense of God's inspection over us, must cleanse it of such thoughts and purposes as are offensive in his sight. When men are thus prepared, they come forth, with great advantage, to the practical exercise of their virtue ; and when they bring with them no evil thoughts from their retirement, to meet the temptations which arise abroad, they are less liable to be hurt by them. The sense of God's presence and inspection (which we are very apt to drop at sight of the world, and which we seldom recover in a crowd) becomes habitual, by the frequent refreshments of private devotion ; and when we bring it into public with us, we feel it of singular weight in cherishing our good purposes, and in checking our bad ones ; and, besides its own influence, secures the influence of another support of our good conduct, arising from our fear of shame ; for, though this principle naturally operates towards keeping us regular, yet we see by daily experience, that it is weakened in its operations, in proportion as we find means to deceive the judgment of the world, or to harden ourselves against it. But when, besides the judgment of the world, we have the judgment of
God

God before our minds, we feel less encouragement for attempting to deceive the one, whilst we are sensible that we cannot escape the other.

It is surely from a neglect of the duty I am recommending, that we see, not only so much wickedness in the world, but so much inconsistency, unsteadiness, and levity, in the conduct of men. The use of private devotion, when rightly performed, strengthens our wisdom as well as improves our goodness—for a material part of private devotion is *thinking*; and they are mistaken who imagine it consists of nothing but *praying*. The mere recital of a form of prayer, whether in the church or in the closet, is neither the acceptable or the useful service; which should be attended with thoughts suitable to the occasion; and the thoughts which are both suitable and necessary for private devotion, naturally tend to make us prudent, as well as good; as they are employed in examining our failures, and seeking the most effectual remedies for preventing them; in forming purposes of a right conduct, and considering the most proper steps for executing them. This is such sort of thinking as will, with frequent application of it, give a consistency and steadiness to our con-

duct—it prepares us for the world—guards us against the errors of it—and gives us both strength and direction in the business of it.

It is to a want of thinking, that most of our misconduct is owing; and, was there no other advantage arising from the duty I am recommending, than that it puts us on this necessary employment, it would be well worthy our observance on that single account; but when to the employment of thinking, we join the employment of praying, as we do in our private devotions—and, after seriously considering what we are, and how we ought to act, we beg God's assistance to support and direct our resolutions, we then strengthen our prudence with religion; and, at the same time that we best prepare ourselves for the duties of this life, we are qualifying ourselves for the happiness of the next.

But when we run hastily into the world, without that preparation of thought, and guard of religion about our minds, with which private devotion would furnish us, we run to meet, we know not what, and to manage what we meet, we know not how; every slight temptation staggers, if not defeats us; we fall into mistakes, or are betrayed into sin, and both wonder and are ashamed to find

find ourselves there : we make resolutions one hour, and break them the next ; are serious or light, wicked or religious, according to the different complexion of the several objects, against which we are thrown. In short, we are tossed up and down in a crowd, without knowing where to go, or how to get there, pressed with inconveniences and in perpetual danger of mischief:—and all this, from not setting out at first with religion and discretion at our side ; which we might have had from our closet, and which would have conducted us with steadiness and safety through the crowd—would have shewn us, at once, the point we ought to make for, and have taught us to walk up to it with constancy and attention.

If such then be the advantage arising from private devotion, that it furnishes us both with religion and discretion, and, by fitting us for the duties of this life, qualifies us for the happiness of the next, we see at what hazard we habituate ourselves to the neglect of it ; since, if the use of it tends to make us discreet as well as good, the neglect of it must, in proportion, tend to make us otherwise.—There are indeed, the more is the pity, men of good sense and abilities, who despise
this

this duty; yet such men, give me leave to say, would not disparage their abilities by saying their prayers; and, wise as they may be, they would be still wiser, if to their good sense they would add the best sense of all, a sense of religion; the want of which must follow a neglect of those means which are appointed for preserving it, and may expose them to the worst of mischief and of folly. Men may pride themselves in their own wisdom; but God would never have appointed the general duty of seeking his assistance by prayer, if it had not been generally needful for the wisest as well as the weakest among us; and the consequence of neglecting such appointment is commonly what we may well expect to see, which is, that those who fancy themselves strong enough to live without the assistance of God, soon learn to fancy themselves wise enough to live without a knowledge of him.

The short conclusion upon the whole is this, That the way to be happy is to be good; and the way to be good is to seek after God for his assistance, by applying such means as he hath appointed for making us so.—And, whoever sincerely desires to be good, will think, that the more opportunities he has for applying such means, the better, and will

will seek after God wherever he may be found.

He will seek after God at church, at home, in his closet, and on his bed—and will be careful not to go forth into the world, without taking God for his guide; who will lead him in the way in which he should go, and, with his arm, will conduct him—through the duties of this life to the happiness of the next.

11. 1947. 1948. 1949. 1950. 1951. 1952. 1953. 1954. 1955. 1956. 1957. 1958. 1959. 1960. 1961. 1962. 1963. 1964. 1965. 1966. 1967. 1968. 1969. 1970. 1971. 1972. 1973. 1974. 1975. 1976. 1977. 1978. 1979. 1980. 1981. 1982. 1983. 1984. 1985. 1986. 1987. 1988. 1989. 1990. 1991. 1992. 1993. 1994. 1995. 1996. 1997. 1998. 1999. 2000. 2001. 2002. 2003. 2004. 2005. 2006. 2007. 2008. 2009. 2010. 2011. 2012. 2013. 2014. 2015. 2016. 2017. 2018. 2019. 2020. 2021. 2022. 2023. 2024. 2025. 2026. 2027. 2028. 2029. 2030. 2031. 2032. 2033. 2034. 2035. 2036. 2037. 2038. 2039. 2040. 2041. 2042. 2043. 2044. 2045. 2046. 2047. 2048. 2049. 2050. 2051. 2052. 2053. 2054. 2055. 2056. 2057. 2058. 2059. 2060. 2061. 2062. 2063. 2064. 2065. 2066. 2067. 2068. 2069. 2070. 2071. 2072. 2073. 2074. 2075. 2076. 2077. 2078. 2079. 2080. 2081. 2082. 2083. 2084. 2085. 2086. 2087. 2088. 2089. 2090. 2091. 2092. 2093. 2094. 2095. 2096. 2097. 2098. 2099. 2100. 2101. 2102. 2103. 2104. 2105. 2106. 2107. 2108. 2109. 2110. 2111. 2112. 2113. 2114. 2115. 2116. 2117. 2118. 2119. 2120. 2121. 2122. 2123. 2124. 2125. 2126. 2127. 2128. 2129. 2130. 2131. 2132. 2133. 2134. 2135. 2136. 2137. 2138. 2139. 2140. 2141. 2142. 2143. 2144. 2145. 2146. 2147. 2148. 2149. 2150. 2151. 2152. 2153. 2154. 2155. 2156. 2157. 2158. 2159. 2160. 2161. 2162. 2163. 2164. 2165. 2166. 2167. 2168. 2169. 2170. 2171. 2172. 2173. 2174. 2175. 2176. 2177. 2178. 2179. 2180. 2181. 2182. 2183. 2184. 2185. 2186. 2187. 2188. 2189. 2190. 2191. 2192. 2193. 2194. 2195. 2196. 2197. 2198. 2199. 2200. 2201. 2202. 2203. 2204. 2205. 2206. 2207. 2208. 2209. 2210. 2211. 2212. 2213. 2214. 2215. 2216. 2217. 2218. 2219. 2220. 2221. 2222. 2223. 2224. 2225. 2226. 2227. 2228. 2229. 2230. 2231. 2232. 2233. 2234. 2235. 2236. 2237. 2238. 2239. 2240. 2241. 2242. 2243. 2244. 2245. 2246. 2247. 2248. 2249. 2250. 2251. 2252. 2253. 2254. 2255. 2256. 2257. 2258. 2259. 2260. 2261. 2262. 2263. 2264. 2265. 2266. 2267. 2268. 2269. 2270. 2271. 2272. 2273. 2274. 2275. 2276. 2277. 2278. 2279. 2280. 2281. 2282. 2283. 2284. 2285. 2286. 2287. 2288. 2289. 2290. 2291. 2292. 2293. 2294. 2295. 2296. 2297. 2298. 2299. 2300. 2301. 2302. 2303. 2304. 2305. 2306. 2307. 2308. 2309. 2310. 2311. 2312. 2313. 2314. 2315. 2316. 2317. 2318. 2319. 2320. 2321. 2322. 2323. 2324. 2325. 2326. 2327. 2328. 2329. 2330. 2331. 2332. 2333. 2334. 2335. 2336. 2337. 2338. 2339. 2340. 2341. 2342. 2343. 2344. 2345. 2346. 2347. 2348. 2349. 2350. 2351. 2352. 2353. 2354. 2355. 2356. 2357. 2358. 2359. 2360. 2361. 2362. 2363. 2364. 2365. 2366. 2367. 2368. 2369. 2370. 2371. 2372. 2373. 2374. 2375. 2376. 2377. 2378. 2379. 2380. 2381. 2382. 2383. 2384. 2385. 2386. 2387. 2388. 2389. 2390. 2391. 2392. 2393. 2394. 2395. 2396. 2397. 2398. 2399. 2400. 2401. 2402. 2403. 2404. 2405. 2406. 2407. 2408. 2409. 2410. 2411. 2412. 2413. 2414. 2415. 2416. 2417. 2418. 2419. 2420. 2421. 2422. 2423. 2424. 2425. 2426. 2427. 2428. 2429. 2430. 2431. 2432. 2433. 2434. 2435. 2436. 2437. 2438. 2439. 2440. 2441. 2442. 2443. 2444. 2445. 2446. 2447. 2448. 2449. 2450. 2451. 2452. 2453. 2454. 2455. 2456. 2457. 2458. 2459. 2460. 2461. 2462. 2463. 2464. 2465. 2466. 2467. 2468. 2469. 2470. 2471. 2472. 2473. 2474. 2475. 2476. 2477. 2478. 2479. 2480. 2481. 2482. 2483. 2484. 2485. 2486. 2487. 2488. 2489. 2490. 2491. 2492. 2493. 2494. 2495. 2496. 2497. 2498. 2499. 2500. 2501. 2502. 2503. 2504. 2505. 2506. 2507. 2508. 2509. 2510. 2511. 2512. 2513. 2514. 2515. 2516. 2517. 2518. 2519. 2520. 2521. 2522. 2523. 2524. 2525. 2526. 2527. 2528. 2529. 2530. 2531. 2532. 2533. 2534. 2535. 2536. 2537. 2538. 2539. 2540. 2541. 2542. 2543. 2544. 2545. 2546. 2547. 2548. 2549. 2550. 2551. 2552. 2553. 2554. 2555. 2556. 2557. 2558. 2559. 2560. 2561. 2562. 2563. 2564. 2565. 2566. 2567. 2568. 2569. 2570. 2571. 2572. 2573. 2574. 2575. 2576. 2577. 2578. 2579. 2580. 2581. 2582. 2583. 2584. 2585. 2586. 2587. 2588. 2589. 2590. 2591. 2592. 2593. 2594. 2595. 2596. 2597. 2598. 2599. 2600. 2601. 2602. 2603. 2604. 2605. 2606. 2607. 2608. 2609. 2610. 2611. 2612. 2613. 2614. 2615. 2616. 2617. 2618. 2619. 2620. 2621. 2622. 2623. 2624. 2625. 2626. 2627. 2628

and you can see the results of the search.

100

arrived in London on the 30th and left for the

of the law, and all are bound to obey it.

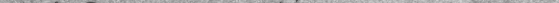
1911

1940

1

100

100



S E R M O N LXXXI.

CHRIST'S MANNER OF LIFE AN
EXAMPLE FOR OUR IMITATION.

MATTHEW xi. 29.

Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly.

OUR Saviour's manner of life and conversation is an object, which cannot escape the attention of every Christian who reads the gospel history of him; and whoever attempts to describe it in other terms, must, in his description, fall as far short of that history, as, in his behaviour, he will fall short of the great example it sets forth.—Yet a few practical remarks upon it may be within reach, and not without use.

1. The mildness of our Saviour's behaviour, is a striking circumstance in his character, and which well deserves, not only our notice, but our imitation. “A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench,” is the description with which
ancient

ancient prophecy sets forth his behaviour. A tender treatment and encouragement of those he came to save was, it is true, consistent; but not more consistent than it was amiable and exemplary. We, indeed, act otherwise; because we abound with what was totally wanting in Christ, that is, *pride*; and, unless we endeavour to divest ourselves of that odious quality, we shall in vain endeavour to imitate Christ.

Pride could not enter his breast, who was from heaven, and who laid aside the glory of it to live, as he did, upon earth; but it not only enters our breasts, who are from earth, but holds full possession of them. It is this quality of pride which is the foundation of our worst behaviour, and which spoils the lustre of our best. It is this which makes us restless, hasty, and overbearing, instead of that meekness and mildness which marked the character of Christ; which, as it flowed from the love he had for mankind, points at the true cause which makes our behaviour defective in those points. Did we really love each other, we should behave with mildness to each other; but till we feel the former, we shall hardly feel, however we may dissemble, the latter.

§

Mildness

Mildness of temper may be natural and constitutional in some; and such will be grievously blameable who suffer any thing to spoil them of so valuable a gift from their Creator: as others will be no less blameable, who, being made of more rough and fiery spirits, do not apply their reason and religion for smoothing and for quenching them; but think, that because they are natural they are blameless. In correcting our natural dispositions, every man hath his work, though different from the work of another; and he who is naturally mild, may have faults in him to correct, which the man, who is naturally rough, may have no concern with. This may be said, that whatever be the natural and different tempers of men, the mild man should study to preserve what nature has given him, as the rough man should study to acquire that, with which, though nature hath not given it, reason and religion will supply him. This he should do upon this plain consideration, that he is a Christian—and upon this plain command of his Saviour, “Learn of me, for I am meek.”

2. In our Saviour's conduct, benevolence and beneficence were blended with mildness; and so they will be in ours, though far short
of

of what they appeared in our Saviour's. If the want of mildness makes men mischievous, the cultivation of it must make them benevolent:—how closely beneficence may follow upon benevolence is another matter; for beneficence arises not at once from the inward operations, either of a natural or even of a religious temper, but from an outward supply of abilities: our Saviour's beneficence arose from divine abilities; and, so far, is imitable by us, that we cannot do *what* he did; but this hinders not but that we may, and our duty requires that we should, do *as* he did; and that we should be beneficent according to our abilities, as Christ was beneficent according to his.

And it is obvious to see, distant as we are from the abilities of Christ, in how many instances we are enabled to imitate his acts of beneficence.

We cannot, indeed, heal as he healed; we cannot heal with a word: but the means which Providence hath put into our hands, and the many useful discoveries, to which he hath led the study and researches of men, are such, that even human skill may work, though not miraculous, yet most beneficial effects.—We cannot teach as Christ taught;

but the care which Providence hath taken for the preservation of the Scriptures, and of the Christian church, and the great improvement and extensive communication of knowledge among us, puts it in every one's power to be, more or less, capable of teaching others their duty. And though we cannot forgive sins, we may reclaim sinners, and lead them up to him who can forgive them. A sedulous application of these abilities, where we are called to the use of them, and a charitable application of them as we have proper opportunity, are duties, by the performance of which we may imitate the beneficence of Christ, and for which we shall hereafter be rewarded by Christ.

There is, indeed, one thing in which (pardon the expression) we may go beyond Christ, in his acts of beneficence—I mean, in giving out of our abundance, in parting with our wealth to relieve and assist others. Christ had no such abundance; Christ had no wealth; when he fed the hungry, it was not money, but a miracle, that did it.

Christ used his own method of beneficence; what was peculiarly his own, and which we cannot imitate; and has left us to follow his example, by using such methods of benefi-

cence as belong to us, but did not belong to him. It belonged not to him to build hospitals for the sick, who had, in himself, absolute power over all diseases: nor did it belong to him to give large donations of money to the poor, who was himself so poor that he had not where to lay his head, and who applied himself to his own miraculous power for the payment of his tribute.

3. This naturally leads our thoughts to another consideration on Christ's manner of life, which was the meanness of it.

The particulars of this circumstance, in our Saviour's life, are too well known, and remembered by us all, to need reciting or enlarging upon. Christ lived thirty years, before he came forth to his ministry, in a mean family, in the meanest part of the country; and, after he came forth to his ministry, though he occasionally went up to Jerusalem, and visited other parts of the country, yet his home was Galilee, and his companions were fishermen. This condition of life Christ chose, that he might set mankind the example of a lesson, which they had so much need to learn, and on the practice of which so much was to depend — even their salvation; for, as Christ himself came forth from the meanest country,

country, and dwell there, so a faith in his gospel, which is the salvation of man, must arise from, and continue in humility.

The mean condition of our Saviour's life exhibits a very useful lesson both to rich and poor; it teaches the rich, not to glory in their condition, and it teaches the poor, to be content with theirs. When we see Christ at his home, at Capernaum, or when we follow him in his journies, from place to place, and observe his poor accommodation, we cannot help reflecting, that this was, not because Christ had no better, but because he chose no better; for when he came into the world, he came into his own, and all things in it, the best it can afford, were within his power; and, that he chose not the good things of the world, shews, not only that the good things of the world were not necessary for the work he came to do, but that they were improper; and if they were improper for his work, in setting his example before us, they must, at least they may, be improper for our work, in the imitation of that example: If so, what reason for glorying in the good things of this life?—unless, what is too much the case, those who enjoy them be indifferent about Christ and his example; if they are not, they must blush to glory in
C 2. their

their splendid suits of apartments, when they reflect, that Christ "had not where to lay his head." As, on the other hand, those who are in poor condition, will comfort themselves, at least will not complain, when they reflect, that they are sitting on the same bench with their Saviour.

Christ's contempt of the world is certainly a lesson well worthy our attention, whatever good things of it be set before us. We see Christ in his mean condition plainly pointing out to us, that the things about us here, whatever they are, are not those which call for our principal attention; the favour, the presence of God, and the glories of heaven, are our happiness: to this Christ points when he himself rejected the good things of this world; for, had they been our real happiness, Christ, who came on purpose to lead us the way to our real happiness, would not have rejected them, and by so doing have led us from them.

This lesson for a contempt of the world, which is so necessary, is not difficult, if we would but think;—but men are so employed in gratifying the senses, that, for a time, they will not think; and afterwards, perhaps, they cannot, or they dare not, think:—by thinking, I mean thinking on what is
to

to be our true happiness, and on its eternal duration; and how short, as well as how false, is the happiness, if we will call it so, which this world, even with the very best enjoyments it has, can furnish out for us. Christ rejected them—and if we cannot reject them with that superiority with which Christ rejected them, at least let us take good heed, if we value true and eternal happiness, that we do not set our affections on them, that we be not enslaved by them.

In his mean condition, Christ had nothing to do with what are called the pleasures of life—they belong not, indeed, to that path of life which he chose to walk in; but had they belonged to his own work, or had they belonged to the true happiness of those he came to save, he would have been where they might be had. Can the men of pleasure think of this without suspecting, whether a pursuit after the pleasures of life, as it does not belong to their true happiness, may not be a hindrance to it? I speak not of those, in whom the pleasures of life have destroyed all sense of religion; they are out of the question—and, I trust, out of hearing;—but can any of us, who have a regard for religion, and both wish and endeavour to be directed

by it, when we look at Christ's manner of life and our own, whilst we are in eager pursuit after worldly pleasures—can we, I say, forbear asking ourselves — Am I imitating Christ?—Much, I own, may be said in plea of innocent pleasures; but not enough to overthrow this truth, which is founded on our Saviour's example, and on our own experience—that worldly pleasures are not the proper object of a Christian's desire; and that, in proportion as they are pursued, they must, in a greater or less degree, hinder our pursuit after what is so.

4. Lastly, we may observe, that Christ, in his mean condition, not only rejected the good things of the world, and had nothing to do with its pleasures, but endured its affronts and reproaches; and thereby hath set us a lesson of patience as well as of humility. These are sister virtues, which ever walk hand-in-hand through life, to soften and subdue the evils of it; and happy are they who entertain these guests: but we cannot entertain the one without the other—if we would have patience, we must have humility; and if we have not humility, it is because we have not patience. A want of this virtue has evils of its own, and heightens those it meets;
and

and we may well be thankful to Christ, who hath given us so striking an example of so necessary a virtue, thereby shewing us, how we should practise it, at the same time that he makes it our duty.

When we reflect on the treatment Christ met with from his townsmen of Nazareth, who reviled him for his preaching, and were ready to throw him headlong from a precipice, we have hardly patience to read, what he had the patience to bear.—Christ withdrew himself from the affront, without resentment.—Hence we learn how to set by, what meets us in every path of human life, ingratitude and insolence; and whoever cannot bear both with patience, is likely to have a troublesome passage through life; and derives no other benefit from his impatience, than that it naturally tends to shorten his passage.

The patience of Christ, under the natural inconveniences belonging to a mean condition, shewed itself, not merely in bearing them—for his disciples bore them too; but in his voluntarily undergoing them, and bearing them, when he had it constantly in his power to relieve himself; and is a circumstance in Christ's conduct, which should make us ashamed of our own, when we refuse to put

24 *Christ's Manner of Life, &c.* Sermon. 81.

ourselves to small, or even great, inconveniences for the assistance of others :—as his patience under the barbarous treatment he met with from the Jews, and the death he suffered on the cross, is a lesson, wrote in the strongest characters on the Christian mind, for our patience in bearing the severest afflictions ; when we reflect, that we are then drinking of the same cup, of which Christ himself drank so largely for our salvation.

SERMON

S E R M O N LXXXII.

O N P R O V I D E N C E.

P S A L M ciii. 19.

*The Lord hath prepared his seat in heaven;
his kingdom ruleth over all.*

A Well-disposed mind feels not a more useful pleasure, than when it pursues a contemplation on the Providence of God. The sense of our own weakness, which must arise from a consideration of ourselves and the world about us, is highly relieved by the reflection, that we are under the care of an Almighty guide; and the apparent evils in human life are much softened, when we consider them as instruments in the hand of God, and as parts of his wise and good government. And it is wonderful, that any should take pains to disprove the being of a Providence, or rejoice in the persuasion that there is none;

as

as if it was an unwelcome situation to be placed under the government of a wise and good Power, that is vigilant and active in ordering every thing to our best advantage.

It is a suspicious symptom that the heart is not right, when we reject what is for our benefit, and disdainfully turn our backs upon those who would take care of us. And though such as scorn the government of Providence, ought to be more strongly qualified for the performance of their duty than others, yet we shall find, that it is not their superior strength, but their weakness, which misleads them; and that it is not their virtue, which makes the government of Providence unnecessary, but their guilt, which makes it formidable. They are conscious, that, if there be such a government, they are within reach of its severity; and therefore would persuade themselves there is none.—Shame makes the presence even of our best friends uneasy to us; but we try all methods of weakening an authority which we are afraid to feel.

It is owing to this disposition principally, that the obscure parts in the government of Providence are picked out, and assiduously wrought up into objections against it; and what should be a lesson of submission and obedience,

dience, is made a handle to obstinacy and disobedience.—When a well-disposed mind meets with difficulties in the contemplation of Providence, it rather concludes, that it sees not aright, than that the things themselves are wrong, and makes no scruple to own itself less wise than the Creator; but when we are pleased at the discovery of difficulties in the conduct of Providence, and, instead of endeavouring to reconcile them with the notion of a wise government, use all means for discrediting it, we plainly discover a prejudice, which blasts at once our arguments and our character.

For, supposing there were no proofs of a Providence that governs the world, yet is it not such a government as good men would earnestly wish for, and only bad men be afraid of? but, supported as it is upon such incontestable proofs, whoever pretends to remove it, and deprive the world of so necessary and advantageous a support, certainly discovers a corrupt disposition in himself, and the worst sort of enmity towards mankind.

Difficulties there will be in the ways of Providence, past man's finding out to account for them; but a submissive faith will much better become us, when we meet them, than
obstinacy

obstinacy and contradiction ; nor ought we to reject the plain proofs which God hath given us of his governing power, because he does not chuse to work always in our sight. It is surely rash to pronounce every thing wrong which we cannot understand, and to deny God the government of the world, because he will not be accountable to our judgment for every part of his conduct.

There is, besides a principle of guilt, which makes men afraid of a Providence, a principle of vanity, which leads some to cavil at it, for no other apparent reason, than because the generality of mankind are fond of a belief in it.—There are those who had rather maintain a wrong opinion in opposition to all the world, than think with the many. This is such absurd petulancy, as would deserve no notice, if it did no mischief ; but it should be guarded against, though the principle, from whence it springs, be trifling and absurd ; for it matters not from how ordinary a quiver the arrow is drawn, if it be shot with effect ; and these men have generally better success than they deserve, as it is their usual practice to treat the subject with an air of mirth, which beguiles our attention, and
steals

steals our assent before we are aware. A religious belief and trust in Providence is treated by them as superstition and cowardice ; and, from their great regard, as they pretend, for the honour and dignity of God, they think us impertinent, in employing him in the business of mankind ; but whether this or the contrary opinion redounds more to the honour of God, or best suits his dignity, will, I hope, appear in the progress of this subject.—Certainly a sober decency is due in all our enquiries about the conduct of God's Providence, and the best qualification for success in them is a conscience which is not afraid of the truth.

God's right of governing the world is an immediate consequence of his creating it ; for nothing can be plainer, than that the author of all things has sovereign right, as he has absolute power, in disposing them to those ends and purposes, for which he has made them. Natural reason, unassisted by revelation, might and did draw this conclusion ; the soberest among the heathen philosophers always joined the notions of a God and a Providence together, and made the Creator of the world the governor of it ; and though some pretended not to admit this, yet it is easy to discover,

discover, that they argued, not from principles of reason, but, from an immoderate attachment to the pleasures of sense; and that they denied there was a governing Providence, for no better reason than because they were afraid of one. But revelation has much strengthened this conclusion, by the most express declarations, and the strongest examples of its truth. The heathen moralist took the same steps of rational inference, from the proof of a God to a proof of his governing Providence, which the Christian moralist takes; but the former had so very imperfect a view into the conduct of Divine government, for want of revelation, that he was often perplexed in reconciling his experience with his reason, and making the apparent irregularities in the world agree with a notion, which he found too strong to quit, that there was an all-wise and good Governor at the head of it. The advantage therefore which revelation brought to the belief of a Providence was, that, by giving us a farther insight into the system of God's government, it furnished us with the strongest examples of what was before believed true, and enabled us to look upon the apparent irregularities in human life, as the suitable effects and directions of Providence.

Not that revelation hath made us perfect masters of God's government, or competent judges of every part in his administration; but what God hath revealed to us yields a sufficient proof, both by declaration and example, that the direction of human affairs is the object of his care; and, though we are not allowed to trace God through all his steps, yet we are allowed to reason from the steps which he hath discovered, and, from the proofs already given of his governing power, to conclude he is vigilant and active, even where the work of his wisdom lies hid from our examination.

The extent of God's government is undeniably as large as the extent of his works. Wherever his creative power has led the way, his governing power must follow:—for where can we stop? the most minute and seemingly inconsiderable beings have the same reason for his care and direction as the greatest, namely, that he has created them; that they cannot subsist without him; and that, if they were worth creating, they are worth preserving, and being directed to those purposes for which his wisdom has produced them.

This conclusion, which makes the care of God's Providence as extensive as the works of his

his creation, is undeniable ; and yet the human mind feels some difficulty in admitting it, from considering, not only the infinite number of objects, which must at once employ this care, but the no less amazing variety of them ; as well as the nature of many things around us, which we cannot help thinking are too mean to deserve the care of God, and that we affront his dignity by supposing them to be the effects of his direction.—But all this difficulty, which the mind feels in its contemplation upon Providence, arises merely from its own imperfection, and is not a reason, but a prejudice, against it ; a prejudice which we are apt to maintain, because we cannot see the manner how God works in his care and direction of the things about us.—So eager is the mind in its pursuit after knowledge, that it strains to reach beyond the limits which God's hand hath set it ; and, with a childish forwardness, rejects what is allowed it, from a disappointment in getting what is forbidden it ; thus, when our reason has led us up to this conclusion—that there is a providential care over every part of God's creation—we are impatient to get on, and, because we cannot distinguish how it is exerted, we are dissatisfied with what reason has offered

us,

us, and are inclined to deny that there is any;—but, so long as the capacity of the human mind is limited, we must be content to admit some truths, though we cannot carry our enquiry into all the circumstances belonging to them; nor must we make our narrow understanding the measure and standard of all truth, by rejecting every thing as false which we cannot comprehend. We believe there is a God, though we cannot see what he is; and we may as reasonably believe there is a Providence, though we cannot see how it operates. It is from our own imperfection, that we stand amazed at the number and variety of objects, which constantly engage the care of Providence. The mind, not being acquainted with any nature above itself, is apt to judge of superior beings by itself;—as one, who has no knowledge of other countries, is apt to expect, that the manners there are like the manners of his own. Thus, because a variety and number of objects distracts our weak attention, and we are obliged to withdraw our care from some things, in order to attend others, therefore we cannot help, in some measure, thinking the same of God; whereas this is an imperfection, which belongs only to created beings, and must not

be ascribed to God, in whom there is no shadow of imperfection. Nor ought the seeming meanness of any object to disturb our apprehension, and make us refuse it a place in the care of Providence: what we call *mean*, or *great*, we call so, with respect to those purposes which we have for them; they may deserve different titles with respect to God's purposes; and, considered as parts of the whole system, their usefulness, and not their size, is the rule by which the care of them is directed.

In order to remove such prejudice, let us go to reason and to Scripture, for such a discovery of the nature of God as they afford; for, as our difficulties in this matter arise from our ignorance, the more clearly we know what God is, the better shall we apprehend not only the probability, but the necessity, of a governing Providence.

1. That God is a Spirit, both reason and Scripture assert; and therefore we are not to expect the like sensible proof of his presence and operations, which we have of material beings about us.—“No man hath seen God at any time.” John i. 18.

2. That the presence of God is extended through all nature, is no less agreeable both to

to reason and revelation. The considerations, which lead us to believe there is a God, have no relation to this or that particular place; but are the same every where, as any where; and therefore, for the same reasons that we say God is *at all*, we must say he is *every where*. It being once admitted, that there is such a spiritual being as God, from whom all things depend, wherever there are *things*, there must be *God*; nor can we assign any reason, why he should be in one place and not in another; and if we have no reason for excluding God's presence from any place, that implies a reason for admitting it in all places.

Scripture expressly confirms what reason dictates. If "the Lord hath prepared his throne in heaven," he hath not confined his presence there; for, "the heaven, and the heaven of heavens, cannot contain him." 2 Chron. vi. 18.—If "heaven be his throne, earth is his footstool."—He "looketh from heaven, and beholdeth all the sons of men—neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight." Psalm xxxiii. Heb. iv.—"Whither shall I go from thy spirit," saith the Psalmist, "or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend

“ up into heaven, thou art there, if I make
“ my bed in hell, behold thou art there.”—
(Even “ hell is naked before him, and destruction hath no covering.” Job xxvi. 6.)—
“ If I take the wings of the morning, and
“ dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
“ even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy
“ right hand shall hold me; if I say, Surely
“ the darkness shall cover me, even the night
“ shall be light about me: yea the darkness
“ hideth not from thee, but the night shineth
“ as the day; the darkness and the light are
“ both alike to thee.” Ps. cxxxix.

Such descriptions of the universal presence of God, though they do not supply us with a notion of the *manner* of it, yet shew the *truth* of it; and though the eye cannot see, yet the mind may be led to believe, that the presence of God passes through the whole frame of nature, and that every part of the creation is full of him.—And this suggests to us the most sublime notion we can entertain of the Deity. Such descriptions as place him in the highest heavens, enthroned in splendor, and surrounded by myriads of angels; which make the pillars of heaven tremble at his reproof, and the earth shrink at his approach; whose progress bows the vault of heaven, and
whose

whose chariot is mounted on the wings of the winds ;—such descriptions, though grand, are but the heightened representations of earthly majesty, and seem drawn more in compliance with our human conceptions, than with regard to the true nature of God and his Divine majesty ; which exceeds description—and the plainest conception of which is the strongest. Such splendid descriptions of God imply a limitation of his Presidence ; and, though they raise our attention, do not fill the mind with that sense we feel from the consideration of an unbounded presence ; they rather make us *fear* than *admire* his power ; which steals with pleasing conviction on the mind, when we consider God as spread over all nature, and operating at once in every part of it : in this view, his power, his inspection, his constant care, stand in the strongest point of light—all difficulty from the variety or number of his works is removed—and *mean* or *great* makes no difference, when the same divine presence and care inhabits and dignifies every individual portion of the universe.

and the difference between the two is not
 in the nature of the thing, but in the
 manner of its being done. The one is
 a thing in itself, and the other is a
 thing in relation to something else.

1011833

S E R M O N LXXXIII.

The same Subject continued.

P s A L M civ. 24.

O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all—the earth is full of thy riches.

IN my last discourse I endeavoured to remove the common prejudice against a governing Providence, which arises from considering the extent and variety of the work in which it is engaged, by shewing, both from reason and Scripture, that the Divine presence is as extensive as his work, and that he pervades and fills every part of the universe. This indeed naturally follows from the common notion we have of God, as a being of infinite perfection; for infinite he could not be, if limited to place, nor perfect, if limited in his operations; if, in short, there was any, the

least part of the universe in which it might be said he *was not*, or that he *was not active*.—From hence, I presume, it is no difficult step to shew, that God governs the world.

The government of Divine Providence may be considered as it directs the natural or the moral world.

Moses, in describing the work of creation, tells us, God said, “ Let there be light—let “ there be a firmament—let the waters under “ the heavens be gathered together into one “ place—let the earth bring forth—let there be “ lights in the firmament of heaven—and it “ was so.” Critics have observed upon this passage, in how sublime a manner Moses describes the power of God; which so easily accomplished its work, that each part of the creation immediately started into being, as soon as God called it forth:—the remark is just;—but it is more useful to observe, that Moses has here represented God as a voluntary agent, in the work of creation; contrary to the opinion which was framed by atheists of old, and which some would now perhaps be glad to have made out—that the world was made by chance, or by a necessary concurrence of certain causes, we know not what, and we know not how. God is represented by Moses, as
intending

intending and decreeing within himself, what he would work ; and not only so, but also as instituting and establishing, by solemn injunction, a law, to be observed by and among the works he decrees to produce. God's commanding those things to be, which are, and to be in such sort as they are, and to keep that tenure and course which they do, is really and truly the establishment of nature's law—a law, which, ever since it was at first established and proclaimed, heaven and earth have always obeyed : their constant labour is to do God's will ; and on their obedience to his will depend the support and beauty of the world. All things, both small and great, fulfil the work that God's original law hath set them ; yet, being inanimate, they know not what they do ; though such are the effects we see, as if they did, most accurately, know what they are working.—With such wonderful and invariable accuracy do they advance, each in its proper work, that no intellectual creature is able, with its utmost capacity, to do that, which nature doth without capacity, without knowledge : from whence it plainly follows, that nature must have some director of infinite knowledge and power, to guide her in her various ways. And who the
guide

guide of nature but the God of nature?—By those laws, which his own all-seeing wisdom at first proposed, his active power ordereth those motions in the material world, from whence arise the various appearances of nature. It is the immediate direction of his hand, which makes the heavenly bodies perform those regular and stated courses, from whence arise day and night, and the different seasons of the year: it is the same constant and active guidance which, on the surface of the earth, directs each particle of matter where to climb, and form the infinite, but distinct, variety of things, both animate and inanimate.

It is a proposition, which both reason and Scripture justify—that the work of God's Providence in the natural world, is not only a constant inspection, but an active guidance of natural causes in the production of their suitable effects.

That natural causes are attended with their suitable effects, is obvious to sense; and that these natural causes must be directed by something superior to themselves, is no less evident to reason; for the highest natural causes are but gross matter; and therefore cannot act, unless they be first acted upon; they

they are therefore merely instruments, by which some superior active principle performs those effects, which we see belong to them—and this superior principle is God.

For, either the operation of natural causes is the immediate action of God's power; or, it is the effect of a principle, which God hath placed between himself and his works, to direct them: but there is no reason which leads us to suppose such an intermediate principle. For to what purpose is it introduced? Is it to save the dignity of God, which would be blemished, if God himself was immediately concerned in the constant direction of his works? This regard for God's dignity is no more than a weak, human, compliment, and agrees only with our own imperfections, but is not suitable to the absolute perfections of the Deity. Do we direct our notions of the King of Heaven, by what we observe in the kings of the earth, whose dignity consists in being exempt from business, and whose natural imperfections oblige them to make use of the ministry of others in the work of their government? But surely it better suits the dignity of God to suppose him active, than to suppose him idle; and exerting an immediate power, rather than substituting a ministry
which

which he cannot want: God wants it not, to save him trouble; from that his infinite power secures him; nor to save his dignity, since his act of creation has ennobled the minutest of his works; which, if it hurt not his dignity to create, it cannot hurt his dignity to preserve; when too his unbounded presence makes his immediate care over them not only easy, but necessary. Since therefore we cannot assign a reason why, in the government of the natural world, God should act by the mediation of a subordinate principle, this implies a reason why we should ascribe that government to his own constant and immediate direction.

Agreeably to this notion, God is every where represented in Scripture as constantly actuating the natural world, and directing its causes and effects by an immediate operation. "Behold (says Job) God is great, he maketh the drops of water, which the clouds do drop and distil upon man abundantly.—Consider the wondrous works of God:—Hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow, or hast thou seen the treasures of the hail, which I have reserved against the day of trouble?—By what way is the light parted, or who hath divided a way for the lightning

“ lightning of thunder ? ” — “ God,” says the Psalmist, “ watereth the hills from above ;
“ the earth is filled with the fruits of his
“ work ; he bringeth forth the grass for the
“ cattle, and green herb for the service of
“ man ; he hath appointed the moon for
“ certain seasons, and the sun knoweth his
“ going down.” — And, as God constantly presides in the ordinary direction of things, according to those laws, which he at first thought fit to establish ; so we are not to suppose him unconcerned in the direction of any extraordinary events, which are observed to happen, contrary to the common course of things : — as the government of nature lies absolutely in God’s hands, we must impute all events to his direction ; for it would derogate from the perfections of God to say, that any irregularities, observable in the world, are owing either to the inattention of its governor, or to the interruption of other beings. When God himself sees fit, he may step aside from the general rule to testify his governing power ; for he has not so confined himself within the first established laws, but that he may set them aside, whenever the wise purposes of his government make it necessary.

The truth then of God’s immediate care,
operating through the whole material world,
and

and directing the infinite variety of causes and effects, depends upon these short and easy propositions :—

1. The perfection of God's nature, his infinite presence, knowledge, and power, not only qualify him for such an employment of his care, but necessarily require that he should be engaged in it.

2. There can be no sufficient reason assigned, why we should have recourse to any intermediate principle between God and the works of his creation, to influence the course and order of material things.

3. The Scripture expressly ascribes the operation of natural causes and effects to the immediate direction of God.

The human mind cannot reach the comprehension of this direction, how, or in what particular manner, God operates in the material world;—and where is the wonder that it cannot? If the motions and effects observable in nature proceed from the direction of Divine understanding, where is the wonder, that man, who is void of Divine understanding, should, by his reason only, not be able to comprehend that direction, any more than that creatures below man, which are void of reason, should, by their sense only, not be able to discern the rational conduct of man?

If the human understanding could discover the counsels, and trace the operations, of Divine wisdom, where would be the difference between God and man? Man would then be as wise as God;—which some indeed pretend to be, and wiser too, if we may judge from the freedom with which they treat his government of the world—with a freedom which themselves would highly resent from servants of their own.

This institution of nature's laws, by which God governs and directs the material world, by which he keepeth all things to that kind of working, which, according to his own wisdom and will, he at the first appointed them, we call the *natural* Providence of God. Man's natural welfare arises from his use of what God hath thus provided; and one great employment of the rational faculty he feels himself endued with, is, to observe the progress of natural causes and effects, and to apply them in procuring the necessities and conveniences of human life. There needs no higher than human understanding, for making such observation and application of God's works, though there needs much more to comprehend his manner in producing them; nor is our inability in the latter any more a reason for laying aside our attention to the former,

former, than a man's ignorance in making a clock is a reason for his not using it. The contemplation of God's works, what they are, and to what uses of man they are subservient, is more than sufficient for the study of man, without enquiring how they are, or what is the secret mode of their production. This study and labour among his works God hath appointed man, in which, the farther we search, the more we still find of blessings and of wonders; the former of which should teach us gratitude to God, the latter should teach us humility: it should teach us gratitude to God, when we see the most glorious parts of the creation subservient to our use; and it should teach us humility, when we see the meanest of God's works containing more in them than the wisest of men can comprehend.

The atheist (if such there be, who can look on the world around him, the variety, beauty, use, and constant order of all its parts, and seriously believe that no intelligent being is concerned in the production and constant preservation of them) is much to be wondered at. If his senses and faculties be formed like other men's, he must feel and reason like other men;—either then he dissembles, which is very probable, or, which is

is not impossible, God hath judicially blinded his understanding, and, because he hath voluntarily shut his eyes against the truth, God hath sealed them up, that they cannot be opened.

Nor is it the atheist only, who moves our wonder: They who believe in a God, and rejoice in the works of his hand, are much to be wondered at, that they are so defective in their gratitude to him, to whose goodness they are indebted for the blessings they derive from his works. "In God we live, move, and" not only "have," but enjoy, "our being." Yet, how little do we think of God! The daily wonders of his power, and bounties of his goodness, are disregarded by us; we view his light with a careless eye; we breathe his air, and taste his food, with thankless lips; and, though God, by his works, is continually presenting himself before us, yet we know him not. He presents himself before us, whenever we clothe, whenever we feed ourselves; in our business, and in our recreations; at home, abroad; in the field, and in the market — where, indeed, so far from being known, or at least respected, that his bounties are too often both delivered and received to his great dishonour and offence; whilst both avarice and luxury are

busy, the one to withhold, the other to abuse, the liberal provision of his hand.—It is ingratitude to God, when we misapply the natural bounties he bestows upon us, consuming that on our lusts and appetites, which he sends us for a mutual and general blessing ; but it is wicked insolence against the governor of the world, when men's avarice and cunning sets them to intercept the bounties of his hand, withholding what he sends, and making scarcity where he has said, Be fruitful — setting exorbitant prices on what passes through their hands, and squeezing from the property of others to gratify their own avarice. Such do not consider, that they will have as much to answer for as they get, and that it will one day be a charge against them, as heavy as their bags, that they have wickedly controlled the Providence of God, plundering their fellow-creatures of the bounties he sends them, and insolently forbidding him to bless them, any farther than they think proper to permit him.

To conclude. Gratitude to God is a reasonable duty under his natural Providence. Thanks, submission, and respect, are duties which we rigorously claim from those we feed ; and therefore we should as strictly pay them

them to God, who feeds us all. And, so continually as God presents himself before us, it is wonderful, that we can as continually forget him, or refuse to thank him as we ought: yet his daily blessings too often go unthanked; and many, with more courage than religion, or good manners, contemptuously, and without thanks or acknowledgment, receive their daily meat of God; who, yet, can as easily stop it in their mouths, as he has brought it thither.—Those who refuse God so slight a testimony of their gratitude, are not likely to pay him more conspicuous ones. And, as a farther neglect of God, though he constantly presents himself before us, seeking us, as it were, in all places, and commands us to seek him but in one, how many reject his call, and refuse him their attendance on his public worship, there to pay him the very easy tribute of one hour's thanks, for seven days preservation!

If men are not religious under a persuasion of God's Providence and care over them, the persuasion does God no honour, nor themselves any good. God hath not made us, and set us in the world, merely to feed us, or to put us upon no higher employment than the beasts; he hath made us, and provides for us,

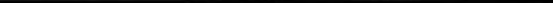
that we may know him, and obey what we know to be his will:—this is religion; this is our business as men, and what properly distinguishes us from the brutes, which, in many qualities and faculties partake with us: they are sagacious and provident; they are faithful, careful of their offspring, benevolent to their kind, temperate. In mere sensible faculties they excel us;—but they have no knowledge of God, nor are they qualified for religion.—Such men, therefore, as live under God's Providence without religion, do truly live, not like men, but like the brutes; being destitute of that which alone distinguishes them from brutes. Man is the only creature upon earth that is dignified with the ability of knowing God, or that is intended to be advanced through that knowledge to immortal happiness; such therefore as know not God, not only forget the dignity *in* which they are made, but the end also *for* which they are made. If this end be worth obtaining, the means for obtaining it must be applied, and we must take care of our religion—a duty, which we naturally owe to God—which is naturally incumbent upon us as we are men—and essentially necessary as we are immortal beings; a due sense of which in our

†

hearts

hearts will naturally prompt us with gratitude towards God for the blessings we enjoy ; as, on the other hand, a serious consideration and grateful acknowledgment of God's blessings towards us is a natural preservative of our religion :—they mutually promote each other, and together are productive of that disposition, which not only best becomes us under the blessings of Providence, but which best qualifies us for a proper application of them ; at the same time that it best entitles us to those immortal blessings in a future life, to which God is leading us, like an indulgent father, through the tender and watchful kindnesses of the present.

KOMRIS



S E R M O N LXXXIV.

The same Subject continued.

PSALM xxxiii. 13, 14.

The Lord looketh from heaven : he beholdeth all the sons of men. From the habitation of his dwelling he considereth all them that dwell on the earth ; he fashioneth all the hearts of them, and understandeth all their works.

IN my last discourse I observed, that the government of Divine Providence may be considered as it governs the natural or the moral world. I have already made some remarks on the former, and proceed now to the latter.

As God's natural government consists in directing natural causes to produce their suitable effects in the material world ; so his moral government consists in his government of mankind, by a distribution of those effects

among them, which constitutes the natural good and evil of human life.

We can no more expect to have a perfect view of this part of God's government than of the other; his wisdom often withdraws itself from human search, and pursues secret tracks in its progress through mankind, as well as in other parts of the creation:—yet, though we cannot always follow it, we may be assured it is there; and, from the frequent discoveries which it affords us of its work, may rest satisfied of its constant operation: so that, whoever takes a serious view of mankind, and compares events and persons together, will find enough to convince him, that the *hand* as well as the *eye* of Providence is over us, and that “God ruleth over all the earth.”

As we cannot suppose that God, after having finished his work of creation, withdrew himself from any farther care for what he had made, so neither can we imagine he would extend his care to all his other creatures, and refuse it only to man; or, that when he has spread his influence through the whole material world, the intellectual world should be destitute of his presence. We cannot charge the infinitely wise Author and Disposer of all things

things with this partiality, that, having placed every thing in that part of the creation for which it was intended, and led it up to that perfection of which it is capable, man alone should be left at large, and not have the guidance of his Creator's hand, to lead him to that happiness for which he is designed. We have therefore this rational expectation of a Providence presiding over mankind—that we know, by undoubted proofs, that it is constantly employed in the government and direction of other inferior parts of the creation, and we have no reason which may lead us to suspect, that that part, which we call mankind, is alone exempt from it. And when we would examine how far *experience* supports this rational expectation, it will be very proper to take these two cautions along with our enquiry.

1. That this state of man is a state of *trial* only, and that the happiness, for which he is intended, belongs to another state.
2. That our most diligent enquiry will not furnish us with a compleat view of the system of God's moral government, and that all we can see is but a part, and not the whole.—The former of these cautions will soften many of the difficulties and severities, which

which may occur in our survey of the conduct of Providence ; and the latter will restrain a hasty judgment, and guard us from building general conclusions upon partial observations.

But, instead of these cautions, some, in their thoughts upon Providence, lay down these two rules of judgment, 1. That, as God is a Being of infinite wisdom, justice, and goodness, his government must be suitable to those perfections. 2. That it is suitable to the wisdom, justice, and goodness of God to dispense good and evil according to the deserts of mankind.—As to the first of these rules, it is undoubtedly true, that God's government must be suitable to his perfections: but here lies the error, in the application of this truth, that every man supposes himself a competent judge of what is suitable to these perfections ; the consequence of which presumption is, that wherever men do not see the marks of these perfections, they deny that it is any part of God's government; when they ought to take the direct contrary method, and, being persuaded, that God's government is such as is suitable to his perfections, should conclude, that every thing is right, though they cannot see the variety
of

of connections by which it is so. Though some dispensations of Providence may seem to us to be difficult and obscure, "God's judgments being unsearchable, and his ways past finding out;" yet we may be assured there is an excellent contrivance in all of them. Though "clouds and darkness may be round about him," yet "righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his seat."—The merit of God's government ought not to be determined by distinct and separate instances, any more than we ought to judge of a man's conduct by taking any particular action by itself—many human actions, so taken, will appear indifferent, trifling, or wrong, which will shew themselves to be quite otherwise, when we see their connection with other actions, and their tendency to some point in view. It is equally wrong to pass judgment upon the Divine conduct by the appearance of a single case, without attending to the connection which it has with many other incidents, and its subserviency to some purpose, which Providence may have in view, though it may escape our notice.

The second previous rule of judgment, which some lay down, upon Providence, is

as

as true as the first, and as much misapplied. That God will dispense good and evil according to the deserts of mankind, is true; but, that he should constantly do it in this life, is not what either his justice or his wisdom requires. If the limits of this life were the limits of God's government, such expectation were just; but, as the few years of man's life are but a small part, either of his existence or of God's government, God's justice and wisdom will stand clear of objection, though the good and evil of human life be not distributed according to the deserts of men—if we have sufficient grounds to believe, that reward and punishment will be suitably distributed hereafter;—unless we will say, that it is inconsistent with God's justice and wisdom to *try* mankind before he makes them happy.—But is not our happiness God's free gift? and may not God propose it to us on his own terms?—If then this be a state of *trial*, it would be improper to make it a state of *reward*; which it would be, if the good and evil of human life were constantly dispensed according to the deserts of men. The good and evil then of human life is not that good and evil, which the justice
of

of God is concerned to dispense with a strict regard to the good or bad behaviour of men; because, considering human life as a state of *trial*, the good and evil belonging to it are often the reverse of themselves; what we call good may prove our mischief, and apparent evils may turn out real good.—If with these precautions we look for God's government of mankind, we may find it to our satisfaction.

For look into the ordinary disposition of human affairs, where, though the inattention or the vanity of man may lead him to impute all events to chance, or his own dexterous management, yet there are so many marks of the hand of Providence in almost every thing which concerns us, that we cannot help seriously pitying their blindness, who do not see them, and as seriously blaming their ingratitude, who will not acknowledge them. It is the result of a fond admiration of that principle within us, by which God has made us free beings, that we fancy ourselves independent of him; and, being used to see the suggestions of our reason followed by the effects which we proposed, we are apt to look upon ourselves as the sole cause on which they depend; without marking, how
God

God has even disposed and directed that reason, or how unable we are to command the external causes of our success.

All causes of all effects and events are in the hand of God. Natural causes are under his immediate and absolute government, and he uses them merely as instruments for dispensing natural good and evil among us, with a view to the direction of our moral behaviour. That the disposition of the natural world has an influence upon the moral behaviour of mankind needs no illustration. The good and evil arising in the natural world are very powerful in the direction of our moral conduct, and man sets all his faculties at work to obtain the one and avoid the other. As, therefore, the direction of the natural world is absolutely in the hands of God, and the natural effects in the material world have a manifest influence on the moral behaviour of mankind, it is reasonable to say, that God governs it with a view to that end; and, though we may not sufficiently attend to this, whilst the common course of things flows even and undisturbed, yet we are often made sensible of it, when, by an extraordinary direction, God sends his judgments to declare his authority, and punish the disobedience of mankind.

mankind.—Even those events, which seem accidental to us, are not chance, but Providence: they arise from a concurrence of causes; but such concurrence of causes is the work of Providence.

God's government of men differs from his government of the natural world: he governs men as reasonable creatures, by laws; as free agents, by the motives of reward and punishment, by external restraints and internal assistance. When God thinks fit, he uses ourselves or others as instruments of his Providence, as well as other natural causes, by influencing our wills, passions, and counsels, and by directing even our actions so as to serve his purposes, whilst we think only to serve our own; and this, without hurting either our free agency, or his own perfection. — We have this power and influence over each other, and why not God over us all? Both men and common incidents can work to make us change our minds, to direct our will, to heighten or abate our passions, to assist or defeat our counsels, and out of bad actions draw forth good uses;—why may not God do this, at whose command are all men's hearts, and all the incidents in life? Thus God makes use of both
good

good and bad men as instruments of his government. His use of good men can carry no objection against Providence ; nor can his use of bad men carry any reasonable one, as if it was inconsistent with the perfection of God to make use of such ministry. God can make the sins of men serve to wise and good uses, without abating their guilt, or partaking in their sin : he never suggests evil designs to men ; but, when men have formed any wicked designs, he can serve some wise and good end by what they wickedly do. In this view of the matter (which shews us all nature and all men, both good and bad, as instruments in the hand of God, for the purposes of his government) we see at once that all events, that is, all the natural good or evil which happens in the world, to individuals, or to kingdoms and nations, are from him ; and that his government of mankind consists in his ordering and appointing these events. But with respect to evil, we must carefully distinguish between *natural* and *moral* evil ;—tho' God orders and appoints what evils every man shall *suffer*, he orders and appoints no man to *do* evil ; he only *permits* some men to *do* mischief, and *appoints* who shall *suffer* by it. —To attribute the evils men *suffer* merely to
God's

God's *permission* only, is destroying his government; for bare permission is not government: on the other hand, to attribute the evil men *do* to God's *order*, is destroying the holiness of Providence; therefore, we must distinguish between the evils men *do*, and the evils they *suffer*.—The evils men *do* God *permits*, but directs and controls them; the evils men *suffer*, God *orders* and *appoints*. God's care of his creatures requires, that no man should *suffer* any thing but what God orders for him; and if such sufferings be just and righteous, how wicked soever the causes be, it is no reproach to Providence to order and appoint them.

This government of Providence over mankind is directed, as well to influence their moral behaviour, as to manifest his own perfections; to shew that he distributes natural good and evil among them, not merely to convince them of his dominion, but also of their duty; and, though it be true, that, considering the present state as a state of probation only, an exact distribution of good to the virtuous, and of evil to the wicked, is not the business of Providence here, yet it is not inconsistent with the nature and design of such a state, that God should give testimony of his

regard and preference to the one above the other, the better to encourage and direct the behaviour of mankind ; for a state of trial, though it admits not *reward*, yet not only admits, but requires, *encouragement* — and ample proof there is of it. It is true, God maketh the sun to rise on the wicked as well as on the good, and sendeth the rain upon the just and unjust promiscuously ; his common blessings are thrown in common among us ; nor is it reasonable to expect God should suspend the course of nature, and work miracles, to make a distinction between the wicked and the good : but whoever will take a general view of mankind, and carry his observations through a series of events, will find the hand of Providence more constant in the guidance of good men, than he may suspect from considering a few particular instances ; and may see, that if virtue be not an infallible security against the evils of human life, it is a certain prevention of many mischiefs, and a prudent method for enjoying the best blessings belonging to it. An infallible security from all evils of life cannot be expected, so long as good and bad men live intermixed with each other ; and good men must often share those afflictions which wicked men draw down,

down, and which they themselves may have not deserved; whether the afflictions be such as arise from the common course of things, or whether they be sent from the extraordinary hand of God. If the father's prodigality be punished with beggary, the children, however undeserving, must be sufferers; or, if God sends his judgments on a wicked people, good men, who are intermixed among them, must not expect the situation of the Israelites in the land of Goshen, to be blest with light whilst darkness is all around them. Such instances of suffering virtue are no irregularities in the administration of Providence, but the consequence of a regular establishment of causes and effects, which can no otherwise be set aside, than by a miraculous interposition, which we have no reason to expect, as we have the promise of another life, where the sufferings which the good man meets with here, shall purchase him an ample retribution.—The same reason is applicable to the instances of prosperous vice; natural causes must produce their suitable effects for the wicked as well as for the good; if God blesses the good man's harvest, the field of the wicked will share the blessing. But would we look at future consequences, we may often

find reason to withdraw our complaint against Providence for such dispensations in favour of the wicked, when we see what we thought an undeserved blessing poured upon him, to be no other than a sure foundation of his ruin. The eye of Providence sees afar off, and his hand works with secrecy;—he planteth evil and he planteth good; his hand holds the root, and the blessings of life often wither into curses, whilst evil shoots up and blossoms forth with good.

Virtue indeed is not an infallible security against the evils of human life, as there is nothing so much under the power of human endeavours, but that the Providence of God may interpose for the disappointment of it, to whom it must be left to make what reserved cases he pleases from the ordinary course of things: but though it be not an infallible security, yet it generally procures it; and men think it a sufficient inducement to apply their endeavours to such courses as do *generally* effect the ends they are designed for. And, though a conflict with distresses is not only often unavoidable, but even proper—as it awakens our hope in another state, for which we are intended—quickeneth our relish of the mercies we enjoy—weans our affections

affections from the world—prevents the surfeits of prosperity—gives us hardiness and courage in this our militant state—and keeps up our sense of dependence upon God; (so that there is no affliction which we meet with, which we could do without :) yet, in the general and ordinary course of things, the blessings of Providence attend the good, if not in such full measure as renders any expectation of a farther reward unnecessary, yet in a measure sufficient to recommend a good behaviour, and a belief of a Providence;—for, excepting some instances of extraordinary trial, or such as are unavoidable without a miracle, we may observe, with the Psalmist, “I have been
“ young, and now am old, yet saw I never
“ the righteous forsaken, or his seed begging
“ their bread.”—A careful examination of mankind will satisfy us, that virtue has its *encouragement* in this life; but we are mistaken in appointing virtue its *reward*, when we would load it with the external advantages of the world, which are as often the *ruin*, as they are the *reward*, of virtue. It is the mind that is the seat of happiness; it is there God pours his blessings when he would reward us. And, when we are looking for instances of happiness, there are thousands that

lie unnoticed by us, who are the truest examples of it; who, furnished with the conveniences of life, enjoy that contented serenity of mind, which affords them a much more even flow of happiness, than pomp or affluence can yield.

The conclusion from the whole is this — That the government of God's Providence extends itself over both the natural and the moral world: in the former, its employment is not only an inspection over it, but a constant active concurrence with natural causes in producing their suitable effects, by such laws as his infinite wisdom has thought fit to establish; in the latter, it directs the events of the natural world with a view to the moral behaviour of mankind, by such a dispensation of good and evil, as is consistent with the nature of an established government, and with that state of probation in which he hath placed us.

S E R M O N LXXXV.

The same Subject continued.

P S A L M cxlv. 17, 18.

*The Lord is righteous in all his ways—and is
nigh unto all them that call upon him faith-
fully.*

AFTER laying down the general rea-
sons for a governing Providence, and
shewing, that it is concerned in the direction
both of the natural and moral world, give
me leave once more to hold up the subject to
your view, to reflect, by way of conclusion,
what useful lessons it carries with it for regu-
lating our behaviour.—Every doctrine of re-
ligion is directed to influence our conduct;
for man is not merely a speculative being,
whose only business consists in finding out
and in contemplating truth; his business is to
act, as well as to contemplate; and the dis-

covery of truth, like the discovery of wealth, is only valuable in a proper application of it.—It is wrong, when our capacities have carried us through the theory of religion, if we shew no regard for the practice of it; as if God had discovered himself to us only to be looked at, and as if he claimed only our admiration, and not our obedience.—The contemplation of a governing Providence, when seriously pursued, as naturally fills the heart with a sense of our duty, as it fills the mind with astonishment; and the Christian especially, who sees too much of God's Providence to doubt its truth, cannot withhold that practical assent, which such an important truth necessarily demands: for it is not sufficient, that, after examining the proper arguments, we merely believe there is such a government, and to that refer the direction both of the natural and the moral world; it is farther requisite, that our practice should be answerable to our faith; and the best testimony we can give of our persuasion that there is a Providence, is to live as if there was one.

1. Thus, when we are convinced of God's constant and universal government of the world, and that his unbounded presence spreads through all extent, we cannot help feeling
this

this suggestion arise within us—that he must be witness to our most private actions, and distinctly acquainted with every thought which stirs within us : a suggestion, which, if well attended to, must influence our behaviour, and prompt us to keep a strict guard upon ourselves, when we are perpetually in his presence, who is the witness, and will be the judge, of our behaviour.—We do not sufficiently consider this ;—being accustomed to converse with material objects only, we habitually think ourselves alone, when we are withdrawn from them, and think and act as if none but our own hearts were conscious of what passes in them, and no eyes but our own saw what is doing ; or, if we sometimes think that the eye of God (perhaps the eyes of many spiritual beings) are over us, we industriously divert a reflection, which introduces us into a company in which we are ashamed or afraid to appear.—This is our weakness, and our ruin ;—that what is most for our real advantage, is often the most disgusting to us ; and, as it happens in our acquaintance with mankind, that we frequently shun the company of those we reverence, for that very reason which should lead us to seek it

it (because they are a restraint upon our immoderate behaviour) so, for the same reason, we endeavour, as much as we can, to shun the company of God, by suppressing the reflection which sets him before us. But this is both vain and dangerous. God continually knoweth and searcheth us; he is "about our bed, and about our path, and spieth out all our ways:" it is in vain, therefore, to flee from his presence, by forgetting that he is with us.—Nor is this less mischievous than it is vain, since, by this means, we remove the best guard which virtue has to defend it. The observation of man may hinder folly from shewing itself abroad, when it lies concealed in the heart; from whence, however, it will find some occasions of coming forth, though it will not take all: but the reflection that God perpetually sees us, will shut the heart itself against folly; and, from a constant persuasion that we are never alone, we shall teach ourselves not only to act, but to think, as becomes us: for, since thinking to ourselves is speaking before God, it is an impious affront to be less careful of decorum in his presence, than we are in our conversation with each other. It is the heart which re-

quires

quires our first and greatest diligence; it is the fountain from whence our actions flow; and if it be once poisoned or disturbed by folly, the mischief will soon shew itself in the current; and there is no time, when folly is so like to poison the heart, as when we fancy ourselves alone. The sense of shame, one of the most useful passions in the human breast, will alarm us against open attacks; but as this sense abates, we grow less afraid to look at the specious proposals of folly; and, if once we can persuade ourselves, that we are secure from shame (as we are apt to do, when we persuade ourselves we are alone) we are then in the dangerous situation of listening to folly, without any friendly alarm to wake our caution. But would we reflect, before whose presence we are, even in our most concealed retirements, and, that our thoughts are constantly passing in the view and examination of God, it must dash the most secret proposals of vice;—and we must have great hardiness in defying the Almighty to his face, who holds the elements of life in his hand, and can immediately arm them to our destruction; or, if he sees us with forbearance, will write our transgressions in his book of judgment, and

and disclose them at the last day, to our eternal confusion.

Nor is this reflection of God's continual presence more useful in the restraint which it lays upon the wicked man, than it is in the support and encouragement which the good man feels from it; whose dispositions and resolutions are, by this means, manifest to Him, with whom he has to do, though he has not an opportunity of producing them into practice, or, though they meet not with the effect which he intended.—For virtue often lies concealed, or steps forth disfigured, as well as vice; and, as it is the hypocrite's remorse, that his vices are open in the sight of God, so it is the comfort of the good man, that his virtues, though obscured by external hindrances, or the perverse judgment of men, are yet evident to “Him, who judgeth right:”—was it not so, virtue would stand upon terms by much too unequal to maintain a conflict with vice, if, under the many discouragements which attend it, there were not an inward supply of comfort to support it—And this is its comfort, that God sees it, however it may be suppressed, and judges of its merit, however misrepresented. Under this consideration,

consideration, the good man feels great encouragement in the discharge of his duty, when he is persuaded, that every inclination to virtue, every serious thought and pious resolution, which stirs within him, is immediately seen by Him, who will both approve and reward it. And, as the sense of God's immediate presence leads him to regulate the thoughts of his heart, and make it fit to appear before Him; so it is a satisfaction that rewards his care, to think, that He constantly regards it, for whose inspection he has prepared it.

2. Another lesson, which the doctrine of God's governing Providence teaches us, is, that, as the dispensation of good and evil is the immediate work of his hand, we should in both submit ourselves to his wisdom; with gratitude accepting, and properly applying, the blessings he bestows, and not impatiently repining under the afflictions he lays upon us.

The doctrine of a Providence leads us to a discovery of the true nature of that good and evil which attends human life; a proper attention to which is our best guide to the use we ought to make of them; in which use consists our duty and our happiness. It was

an impatient curiosity to know good and evil, which ruined our first parents, and it is inattention to it that ruins their posterity.

The true nature of good and evil is best known by considering the true cause from whence they proceed; and an error of judgment, in imputing them to a wrong cause, will ever be attended by an error of practice, in making a wrong application of them. If we consider them as the blind effects of chance, or as the regular effects of natural causes, without any other superior principle of direction than our own reason and wisdom, we unavoidably betray pride or discontent, according as blessings or misfortunes attend us; but when we consider them as parts of God's administration, and sent with a view to serve his purposes of government over us, we feel a reason for submission, and an obligation of applying them to the uses for which they are dispensed.—If adversity frowns upon us, it is our advantage, as well as duty, to look up to God, who hath set it before us; whose power makes our submission necessary, and whose wisdom, which ordereth all things for good, reconciles us to that affliction which may lead to our advantage. For, as God disposeth the natural world with a view to

4

his

his moral government of it, we may well conclude, that, as his blessings may be the encouragement as well as the employment of duty, so afflictions may be sent to teach us to deserve it, by either correcting our follies, or improving our virtues. The best among us have but too much reason for referring the chastisements of Providence to the first of these causes; but to whichever of them they belong, they administer comfort as well as smart; and we feel reason, not only for submission, but for thankfulness. But if, besides our own advantage, we reflect, that Providence may have some general end in view through our afflictions, and that we are employed, though in a difficult, yet in a useful part of his administration, we have reason to be contented, that we are employed in his service, who appoints us not our work without appointing us our reward.—In this view, the lightest afflictions are worth our observance, and the heaviest should not betray us into discontent.

If prosperity smiles upon us, it should restrain our pride, when we reflect, that the good we enjoy is not our own; but that God hath entrusted us with it for his service. This suggests to us the duty of using it aright; and makes us humble in the possession of it,

it, lest, abusing the bounty of our Creator, who can both give and take away, he deprive us of what we do not deserve, and transfer it to others, who will use it more to his glory. —It is a dangerous, as well as an ungrateful disposition, to forget we are dependent upon the Providence of God. We are his creatures : and the situation which best becomes us, and is of the most advantage to us, is a state of constant attention to him ; a state of trust in that Being, who made and sustains us. It heightens our enjoyments of the blessings of life, when we consider them as the dispensations of his hand, and as proofs of his care and regard for us ; and a sense of gratitude directs us to that use of them, which is most agreeable to him, from whom we have received them. For want of this reasonable acknowledgment we lose the satisfaction of considering, that we are objects of God's favour ; and, by looking up no higher than ourselves for the cause of our happiness, we are apt to look no farther than ourselves in the application of it. The industrious man feels an additional pleasure in contemplating the increase of his store, when he considers it as the reward of his honest labour ; and, sensible of the superior hand from
whence

whence it comes, is encouraged to pursue the same care in the use of it, that he had taken in acquiring it : but when we forget the *hand* of God, we soon forget his *will* ; and, by thinking ourselves absolute authors of what we possess, we act not only as if we had an absolute right in the disposal of it, but as if we had absolute power in the security of it. The demands of vanity and vice, however impertinent, are readily gratified ; and, not considering where or how our prosperity began, we are apt to forget where or how it may end. — There are too many examples among us to support this observation ; — so that, without enforcing the lesson of a dutiful dependence upon Providence from a principle of gratitude, interest might direct us to it ; since, if we look into mankind, we shall see, that they best improve the blessings they enjoy, who are the most ready to acknowledge the goodness of Providence, from whence they are derived. — Why then should we refuse this acknowledgment, so reasonable in itself, and so advantageous to us ? For, is it not reasonable to pay our acknowledgments for past benefits — and is it not advantageous to behave so as to deserve future ones ? Or, is it not the Providence of God, to whom we

are indebted for the blessings of life—and does he not expect, and will he not reward, our dutiful acknowledgments of his favours?—His hand is too visible among us, to make such enquiries as these doubtful: and, besides that reason convinces us it must be so, experience shews us that it is so; for, notwithstanding the many seeming irregularities in the disposition of human events, there is enough to convince us of a connection between the obedience of man and the favour of God; and that, though this state be a state of trial, yet, even here, the best means of being happy is being good. — But then, let us not lay down a wrong notion of happiness; let us not confine it to wealth, honour, and plenty, and judge those only happy who abound with these, and those always unhappy who want them: for these are but instruments in the hand of Providence, by which he can make men either happy or unhappy;—were they sure means of happiness only, wherever they are found, we should see happiness;—but how often may we see them applied as a rod of vengeance!

Let us not ground our judgment on partial observations, and a wrong notion of happiness; but consider the extent of mankind, and
the

the variety of conditions, into which God hath disposed them ; in consequence of which disposition we shall find reason to observe, that happiness, such as may be met with in this life, is not confined to this or that particular state ; but that every state, which Providence hath appointed, is capable of affording happiness suitable to it, and sufficient for those whom he hath placed in it ; and his dispensations will stand clear of all objections, if we can observe, that, in general, the performance of the duty belonging to each station is rewarded with the happiness belonging to it. For there is as great a variety of true happiness, as there is of condition ; and, as we may observe, in the general system of nature, that the happiness of one species of beings is different from the happiness of another species ; so, among mankind, which is disposed into a variety of conditions, the happiness of one man is different from the happiness of another ; because the happiness of each must be suited to his faculties, and his faculties to his condition.

In judging, therefore, of God's dispensations, we must not confine our view to one particular sort of happiness, when there is such great variety of it among mankind ; but,

taking each man in his station, in which God hath thought fit to place him, we should consider whether the duty of each condition be not ordinarily rewarded with the happiness belonging to it. This sets the conduct of Providence beyond all reasonable objection, and teaches us, not only to look up to God, for the good which is dispensed to us, but likewise to be contented with what he gives us to enjoy. For his wisdom ever attends upon his goodness in the distribution of his blessings; and, as he will not deny the good man that share of them, which is suitable to his station, so neither will he heap more upon him than he wants, and consequently more than he can bear.—The goodness of Providence does enough, if it supplies our wants; it is too much to expect it should always gratify our wishes; nor should we, with our blindness and imperfection, presume to dictate what we want, or judge of God's goodness by his compliance with our wishes; yet this is the common rule by which we examine Providence. We estimate our own and others happiness by what we wish for ourselves; not considering, that others may wish differently from us; and that even our own wishes may be, and too often are, quite different

ferent from our wants.—For, could we look into the secret history of mankind, and view all the events belonging to it, perhaps nothing would give us a more full conviction of a governing Providence, than this single observation—that man is often made happy by having his wishes refused him.

To conclude—Let us but deserve the favour of Providence, and we shall soon be convinced of his care. Let us but take our observation right, from an advanced and general view of mankind, and with a proper notion of the good and evil which attends them, then, by a strict comparison of persons with things, where we can make the observation, and by taking a series of events together, we shall plainly discover the hand of an over-ruling Providence. But partial observation, and improper notions of good and evil, will lead us into difficulties ;—yet, even then, whilst we are complaining of the absence of Providence, it often discovers itself in some event, as much above our expectation, as it is useful to our purposes ; and shews, that it has been all the while, though invisibly, yet constantly, engaged.

The more we pursue our contemplations upon a governing Providence, the better foundation

dation we lay for our religious and moral behaviour: the constant care of God over us leads us to a discovery of what we are; and by observing the relation in which we stand to him, and to our fellow-creatures, we are led to the performance of the duties we owe to both.—On the other hand, by neglecting to contemplate the care of Providence, we soon come to doubt there is any;—and, after removing the actual operation of God's care out of the world, it is no difficulty to remove his inspection too; and then the next step carries us to a disbelief of his being; and, after men have arrived at a disbelief of a God, there are no reasons sufficient for such love and regard for our fellow-creatures, as is necessary in this state, and worthy of a reward in another.

S E R M O N LXXXVI.

The same Subject continued.

EZEKIEL xviii. 30.

I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord God.

IN this chapter of Ezekiel, God is introduced as vindicating his justice in his dealings with the Jews.—They had a proverb among them—that “the fathers eat sour grapes, and the children’s teeth were set on edge;” by which they meant, that the fathers had sinned, and the children were punished for it. By the use of this proverb they cast a reproach on the Divine justice, and shewed too high an opinion of themselves.

God condescends to answer this reproach;—and first asserts his sovereign right and power of government over them;—“Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father,

“so also the soul of the son is mine.”—God next asserts the equity of his government, in opposition to their charge of inequality; and tells them—“the soul that sinneth, it shall die.”—God tells them farther, and more particularly, that, “if a man be just, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live.—If a good father begets a wicked son, that son shall surely die; or, if a wicked father begets a good son, the father shall die in his iniquity, but the son shall not die for the iniquity of his father, he shall surely live.”—God farther asserts the equity of his government, and assures them, that, “if a wicked man turneth away from his wickedness, and doth righteously, his wickedness shall be forgot, and in his righteousness shall he live: but if a righteous man turneth away from his righteousness, and doth wickedly, his righteousness shall be forgot, and in his sins, that he hath sinned, in them shall he die.—Yet, saith the house of Israel, The way of the Lord is not equal. O house of Israel, are not my ways equal? are not your ways unequal? Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways.”

Thus

Thus did God once condescend to reason with his people, the Jews, upon the equity of his governing Providence. What he then said to them, he says to all mankind: and whoever, at any time, is disposed to take up the cavils of that ungrateful people, and to be dissatisfied with the government of Providence;—or, whoever is disposed to go beyond them, and deny that there is any such government—may here meet with an answer.

For God here asserts the reality of his government over mankind, in terms too plain and strong to be mistaken or evaded—when he says, “Every soul is mine—the soul that doth justly shall live; but the soul that sinneth, it shall die.”—This declaration, I say, is a proof of God’s moral government of mankind;—for, are we to think it concerns the Jews only? It is true, they were God’s peculiar people; God eminently distinguished them from other nations, and condescended to put himself at the head of their polity;—but why?—Was it to shew the rest of mankind, that he had nothing to do with *them*?—or rather, by his extraordinary government of the Jews, did not God mean to shew the rest of mankind the ordinary methods

thods by which he governs the world?—Though God was the *king of the Jews*, he was still the *governor of the world*; and *therefore* did God make himself the one, that he might shew himself to be the other. To this end is the history of that people preserved, and we are bid to look into it, not merely for our amusement, to see how God dealt with the Jews, but for our instruction, to learn how he deals with all mankind. The circumstances, belonging to that administration of God's government, were particular; but the lesson it holds out is a general one—That God governs the world—that he is a God of justice and power—that he inspects the conduct of men—and that he will reward the good, and punish the evil-doer.

This declaration of God's moral government over man, which is held forth to us in Scripture, as it is full and convincing, so is it necessary for establishing the truth of it; for, without this, men would hardly have been able to get at certainty in the matter; the farthest they could have gone, by the help of reason and observation, would have amounted to no more than a well-grounded probability of its truth. And even this would
have

have fallen within the reach of but a few studious, contemplative men; the bulk of mankind would not have been able to see so far; and must have been, as in fact they were, miserably uncertain in this important point.—Here, therefore, revelation very seasonably throws in the assistance which was wanted, to confirm a truth which natural reason had found probable, and to give *all* men a certain assurance that God governs mankind, which *some* only before thought it reasonable to expect.—Such, therefore, as are disposed to deny the reality of God's moral government, must be shewn the Scriptures;—if they can set aside their authority, they may then, if they can, expose the insufficiency of such natural arguments as are brought in proof of a governing Providence; but, if they cannot first set aside the authority of Scripture, it is to no purpose for them to attempt going any farther;—for, if God hath expressly declared to us, that he governs the world, it must be true, however unable we might be to come at the knowledge of it without such declaration.

The *reality* of God's moral government is a good and sufficient proof of the *equity* of it; for, when once we are assured that God,
who

who is a being of infinite justice and wisdom, governs the world, we must be assured, that such government will be right; and the greatest difficulties and obscurities observable in it, can only prove our want of knowledge, but will never prove God's want of equity.—We may see, what the Jews complained of, that the fathers sin, and the children suffer for it; we may see the wicked in prosperity, and good men afflicted;—yet this will not warrant us to deny the reality of God's moral government over us, or to doubt the equity of it; nor will it overthrow the declaration God hath made, of judging every man according to his ways.

Our knowledge of God's government must needs be deficient;—we cannot see the whole system of it;—we cannot see how this part of it, which we call the government of mankind, is connected with other parts of it, and with the whole. That there is such a connection, seems more than possible; and, if there be, it is plain, that, with our partial knowledge, we are not qualified to judge of the whole; and, consequently, that some things, which, in our limited view, appear wrong, in a more extensive view may appear quite otherwise.—But this is not all; our knowledge

knowledge of God's government is not only deficient in those points which lie beyond our capacity, but our observations are short, even in those which lie within our knowledge.—

How God's government of mankind is connected with other parts of his government, we are not able to know; but that the moral government of mankind is connected with the natural government of it, we may know.—

We know from Scripture, compared with what we see in the world, that God not only directs the natural course of things, as well as inspects the manners of men; but that he directs the former, with a view to the latter, and often makes natural good and evil the reward or punishment of our moral good or bad behaviour.

We know this—but we do not sufficiently attend to an easy observation, that follows close upon it; which is, that though God makes use of the natural course of things to serve his moral government of man, yet we are not to expect he should set it aside to serve it; for, both being parts of his government, they are both to be maintained. This observation, I say, we do not sufficiently attend to, when we join in the common objections

that are raised against the equity of Providence. For instance, when we join with the Jews in their proverbial reproach, and think it hard, that, when the fathers are the sinners, the children should be the sufferers—if we rightly consider it, we shall see, that it cannot be otherwise without a miracle.—We are so connected with the things about us, and with one another, that, as most of our moral actions are productive of some natural good or evil, so almost every man's natural good or evil, that he feels or produces, must reach beyond himself. —The vices, as well as the sufferings, of men, operate in such a manner, that the mischievous consequences of both will reach farther than the persons to whom they belong, and with whom they begin; nay, the mischievous consequences of men's vices may not arise soon enough to reach themselves, but may fall upon the innocent.—Poverty is a natural mischievous consequence of prodigality; and if a prodigal father himself meets with poverty, his family must needs feel it too; but as this is a mischief, which, in the ordinary course of things, arises gradually, it may arise too late to punish the guilty father, who may have enough to feed

his

his vices to the last—and leave his innocent children to feel the whole burthen of the poverty he has been bringing on.

Shall we, on such occasions, say, with the house of Israel—"The way of the Lord is not equal?"—we shall say weakly, if we do: For what is there to charge Providence with in this matter?—Is it to be expected, that Providence should preserve the family's substance, as he once did the widow's cruse of oil, and keep it full for the children, notwithstanding the father's daily waste of it?—It is no way reasonable, that God should stop the usual course of things on such occasions, and throw his government of nature into disorder, to carry on his government of man, which he can well support by other methods. Nor does it impeach the equity of Providence, that, in such cases, the guilty has escaped without feeling the natural punishment of his vices;—for the natural mischiefs, belonging to vice in this life, are not the *only* punishment of it;—and though, where they fall on some wicked men, they fall with equity, yet, where they do not fall on others, they are not unequitably withheld, so long as there is a full punishment in reserve for them. And, though in such cases the innocent

cent children feel the consequences of their father's wickedness, yet they neither bear his iniquity nor his punishment:—his iniquity is with him, and his punishment shall be on him.—What the children feel is poverty;—which is not a *punishment* from Providence, but his *appointment*; and shall we say that such appointment is unequitable?—Shall we charge it as an unequitable conduct in Providence, that all men are not rich, when we see such very good reasons of wisdom why many should be poor?—We must at least allow the Governor of the world his just prerogative of appointing men their several stations in life, and of making poor, and making rich, as he sees proper. If so, how does it affect the equity of God's conduct, at what time he makes them so? whether he appoints a man his station of poverty at his birth, or farther up in life.—We may call poverty a hard appointment; and think it still harder, when we fall into it after an enjoyment of plenty; but this amounts to little more than saying, that we like better to be rich than poor, and that the more we have been used to the enjoyment of wealth, the less we like to be without it: which is very natural, and very true; but does not at all

all affect the equity of Providence in making us poor—unless we would lay it down as a rule, for Providence to deal by us as we like: but, so long as the conduct of Providence is directed by other and higher rules than this, we should be cautious how we judge every thing to be unequitable, which we feel hard in it.—With respect to the instance we have been considering, it is as equitable, surely, for the Governor of the world to punish a wicked extravagant father in the next world as in this;—it is as equitable for him to withdraw an estate from his children, as it would have been, to have never set one before them;—and, it is as equitable, to make them poor, by the means of an extravagant father, as it would have been, had they been born poor.

In this view of the matter we have been considering, we come at an easy solution of what appears difficult in the declaration God has made—that “he visits the sins of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation.”

In the instance just now stated, we see the poverty of the children follows, as a natural consequence of the father's prodigality; and here it may be said—“God visits the sins of

“the father upon the children,” when that evil falls on the children, which is the natural consequence of the father’s sin—not that God *punishes* the children for the sins of their father;—for, though all punishments in this life be visitations of God, yet all visitations of God are not punishments. God’s visitations are all his appointments and dispensations—of natural good as well as of natural evil; whether the latter befall us as punishment, or to serve other purposes of God’s government over us:—and these, though they be God’s visitations, yet, at the same time, are natural consequences in the ordinary course of things; and they arise some sooner, some later. Sometimes the evil natural consequences of men’s misbehaviour arise so soon, as to lay hold on the sinner himself; in which case, they are both an *evil* and a *punishment*: or, the sinner himself may escape them, and they may arise upon his children; in which case, they are an *evil*, but not a *punishment*: or, they too may escape them, and they may arise upon the second, third, or fourth generation—not as *punishments*, but as *appointments*, or *visitations* of God, in the course of natural consequences, as they follow under his government.

†

God’s

God's declaration above mentioned thus considered, gives us this warning against sin—that the natural evil arising from it, though slow, is sure, and though it falls not upon ourselves, may fall upon those who come after us—sooner or later:—for the expression, “to the third and fourth generation,” is not determinate, as reaching no farther, but is an indeterminate expression for its falling some time or other;—if on the sinner himself, it is part of the punishment for his sin, and, if he sincerely repents, may be the whole of it; otherwise, if the natural evil consequences of his sin fall not on the sinner himself, but on his posterity, they have their present appointment or visitation, and he will have his future punishment.—In the mean time, whoever feels the sentiments of a man, as well as the guilt of a sinner, will feel it a powerful dissuasive from sin, that though himself only is chargeable with the *guilt*, and liable to the *punishment*, of his sin, others, who are near and dear to him, may be loaded with the *mischiefs* of it; and God, as Governor of the world, and of its natural events, hath set this dissuasive before us—and, that we may not sooth ourselves with our own present security in sinful practices, hath assured us, that, be-

sides our own future punishment for the guilt of our sins (if we meet with none here) our posterity, in the ordinary course of his extensive government over human events, may feel the mischief of it here to latest generations.

To conclude.—By duly observing the connection which there is between God's moral government of man, and his government of the natural world about us—and by considering, that, though each is subservient to the other, yet both are to be maintained—we may be able to see, how it comes about, that wicked men often escape the natural mischiefs belonging to their wickedness, whilst others, either in the present or future generations, are oppressed and suffer by them.—Things about us must take their course, and natural causes must produce their natural effects, as Providence hath appointed.—And, mankind being connected together, as well as with the things about them, others must be affected by what we do and feel;—and, so long as Providence does not think fit to interpose, in an extraordinary manner, to alter this order of things, to suspend the causes of natural evil, in favour of the good, and to hasten them, in displeasure of the wicked,

it

it must needs be, that the former will often fall into mischiefs they have not deserved, but which may turn to their good—whilst the latter feel not, indeed, the mischiefs they have deserved here, but are kept for the punishment which they shall not escape hereafter.

SECTION

113

S E R M O N LXXXVII.

ON DISSIMULATION.

R O M. xii. 9.

Let love be without dissimulation.

A Mutual love of each other is a principle as necessary as it is amiable; without which, those duties of society, which we can claim of each other, will lose much of their merit, and those which we can better wish for than demand, will lose all the strength that supports them; for to be just and honest only upon the principle of self-love, makes men at best but inoffensive members of society, and if it saves them from the hatred, hardly procures them the esteem of others; but the amiable and voluntary duties of humanity and benevolence are quite impracticable, where we feel not a love of others to direct and to support them.

This principle belongs to our natural constitution, nor can we disclaim it without forfeiting our character as men; but it is more particularly our duty as Christians, nor can we disclaim it, without forfeiting our title to the kingdom of Christ.

But though we dare not disclaim this principle, we may dissemble it; and the Apostle's advice in my text contains a dissuasive from this practice; though, like many other topics of Christian advice, it hardly suits the prevailing taste and temper of mankind.

Diffimulation is the first lesson we learn; and, as the world goes, the man who has no diffimulation, ought to have no business here. We see it take possession of the heart, as early as nature and reason can begin to plant any sentiments on which it may employ itself; but, we are so well pleased with the discovery of reason in the young breast, that we take no distaste at the misapplication of it; and when we consider them as stepping forth into mankind, we are hardly inclined to disarm them of a weapon so necessary for their defence. With this encouragement diffimulation grows up with our natural faculties, and imperceptibly insinuates itself into the most valuable parts of our behaviour; and, from
being

being indulged in little matters, claims the management of greater. There is scarce a character in life in which it is not to be found; but we dignify it with the name of prudence, and, persuading ourselves it is a virtue, we think the cultivation of it both necessary and commendable.

But, whatever we may think fit to call it, diffimulation is truly a moral vice; and, whatever pretences may be raised to shew its expediency, there can be none brought to justify it. It is true, men will often make a mischievous use of the sincerity they find in others, and by that means lay hard inconveniences upon the open practice of it; but whoever concludes from hence, that diffimulation is justified, holds forth this maxim—that whatever is expedient is morally right; a maxim which will reach farther than the defence of diffimulation, even to the defence of the greatest crimes that can be committed. If honesty be a moral virtue, diffimulation must be a moral vice; nor can the frequency of its practice, or the greatest advantages arising from it, ever alter its nature; much less can we make it a virtue, merely by calling it one.

This vice, then, of our nature, thus established and encouraged, spreads its influence over every virtue which belongs to society; and, as the love we owe to others is our best title to their esteem, and to the benefits attending it, it immediately seizes that for its object, and goes to work with great alacrity and with too much success.

Dissembled love assumes as great a variety of shapes, as real love has offices belonging to it. It affects courtesy and esteem, both which are reasonable and useful duties, when sincerely and properly applied; but when falsely pretended, or improperly applied, they become odious and mischievous: in the former case, they are a suitable reward and encouragement of good actions; in the latter, they too often lead men into weak, if not wicked ones, by humouring either their vanity or their vices. — Honest love observes a reasonable measure and just propriety in the courtesy and esteem which it expresses, without which observance every duty loses its merit. The courtesy which gives what is due, and in the manner it is due, gains as well as bestows esteem; but when immoderately or improperly paid, it does neither: it bestows no esteem;

esteem; for when men are profusely loaded with more courtesy than they can think justly belongs to them, they will suspect the sincerity even of that which is their due: nor does it gain esteem; for, under the suspicion, that the courtesy which is paid wants sincerity, men are more inclined to take distaste at it, than they are to think him a friend who pays it. Dissembled love transgresses both against measure and propriety, in the courtesy and esteem it pretends to shew; upon this maxim—that, all men are uneasy at receiving less respect than they think is due to them; few think they receive more than is their due; and fewer still are displeased, if they do think so.

Hence arises flattery; a hurtful practice, however pleasant, either to him who receives it or to him who gives it. To feed men with more praise than they are sensible they deserve, entices them to be less careful in making true merit their title to it; it is like being paid our wages before we do our work, and is as likely to make us idle. It requires nice judgment to feed men properly with commendation; a weak mind will be surfeited with even a moderate share of it, and some will better bear the disgrace which they have not

not deserved, than they will the praise that is their due. In short, praise is the support of merit, as food is the support of life; and the same care is necessary in the distribution of both, else we surfeit the merit we should encourage, and destroy the life we should support.

Nor is the mischief of flattery confined to him who is the object of it; it is reflected back on him who gives it. For he who lavishly and indiscriminately bestows that commendation which is due only to merit, shews himself no friend to the latter; and, in being accustomed to set aside its authority in distributing his praise of other men's actions, is naturally betrayed to set it aside in conducting his own, and will be apt to expect he may acquire praise at the same easy rate at which he bestows it—without deserving it.

But the worst mischief in flattery is, that it not only surfeits the virtues, but encourages the vices and follies, of others; not content with loading men's virtues with more praise than they can carry, it softens their vices, and makes them appear less odious than they really are. The flatterer's aim is to please the person he is addressing, and therefore he will use any means agreeable to
that

that end; and the vices and follies of men, when artfully handled, may be the surest means of procuring their favour; because a commendation of their virtues is felt only as the payment of what is due; but a mitigation of their follies is felt as an indulgence: the former will either find their own way to applause, or will be contented without it; but the latter want assistance to countenance them: and whoever removes the shame and uneasiness attending folly, which is the flatterer's aim, very strongly bespeaks the favour of those to whom it belongs.

These mischiefs, then, dissembled love works in the common offices of civility; but it is then most hurtful, when it creeps into the sacred offices of friendship; these are of greater importance, and we feel ourselves much more sensibly hurt by false friendship, than by unmeaning civilities or servile flattery.

It is on friendship we depend for a supply of that mutual assistance, which we want in pursuing and maintaining our happiness. Man, considered as an individual, is an indigent helpless creature, nor can he put forth a hand to reach his share of natural good, without the aid and concurrence of his fellow-creatures. This is not so properly a defect in
our

our constitution, as it is a circumstance, which adapts us to the condition in which our Creator hath thought fit to place us; who, intending us for society, that we might be dear to each other, has made us useful to each other; and, after ordering that we should seek our natural happiness by a mutual assistance, has suitably adapted us with such affections as may lead us to give, and to deserve, that assistance.

Friendship then is a natural human affection, and, as such, must be an universal one; and yet, if we look into mankind, we may perhaps be inclined to think it is not so, and that there is too much reason to complain at the want of it: but we are to remember, that man may misapply the natural affections which God hath implanted in him; and therefore, a want of the suitable effect, which any affection should produce in any particular instance, does not prove the absolute want of that affection—which may exert itself on other more improper objects, which a depraved judgment may recommend, instead of those which reason and duty set before it.

It is thus with the affections of love and friendship; they are natural, and they are universal: no man is destitute of them, though

too many misapply them: perhaps there are few who are not chargeable with a want of them in some particular instances, where they are justly due. The mischief lies here—our affections are not so obedient to the direction of reason as they ought to be; so far from it, that they often conspire together, to throw reason from her just monarchy, and to set up a republican government of their own, in which each passion takes its turn, in claiming a privilege of leading the rest; hence it is, that, instead of seeing the several affections produce their suitable effects, by being employed on their proper objects, we see them produce nothing but mischief, by being misemployed; and even the amiable affections of love and friendship, like the honest members of a disordered polity, are overborne in the stream of confusion, and are thrown on objects, which, in a regular government, they would have avoided.

Friendship, then, is a natural and universal affection; and, consequently, it will be an easy matter to counterfeit it in particular instances; for, as there is scarce any man but what really feels it in some instances, so he will thence be qualified for dissembling it in many other instances, where he finds occasion, though
he

he feels no sense of it. And, as it is easy to counterfeit friendship, so it must be highly mischievous to do it; for what is intended for the best purposes, by abuse becomes productive of the worst; and, if the use of friendship be directed to promote the happiness of mankind, the abuse of it must be followed by unhappiness and disorder.

Dissembled friendship traffics for the services of others, without giving any in return, and beguiles men to trust their happiness in our hands for the improvement of it, when we are disposed to neglect, if not abuse, such trust.—There need not more be said by way of charge against this practice; and, that this is not too much, will appear from considering the employments of dissembled friendship, and the motives which support them.

SERMON

S E R M O N LXXXVIII.

The same Subject continued.

R O M. xii. 9.

Let love be without dissimulation.

I. **I**T is one employment of dissembled friendship to be lavish in professing services, without any thought or design of putting them in execution; and one motive which supports this sort of practice is vanity.

It is making ourselves considerable, to have others expect what may promote their happiness from our hands. We are naturally fond of superiority, and of having others dependent upon us; and this purpose is better served by soothing than by satisfying the expectations they may have from us; the soothing their hopes keeps them our slaves, but satisfying them makes them their own masters, if

VOL. III.

I

not

not ours too. A generous breast, indeed, feels pleasure in gratifying the expectations of others; but it is pain and jealousy to the selfish heart, which is well pleased to see others pine for what they want, but is alarmed to see them gratified.

This sort of vanity, which feeds upon the disappointment and dependence of others, is very apt to divert as well as feed itself at their expence. Outward professions are as fit for one as they are for another: and, where there is no principle of sincerity in those who make them, which fixes them to one, no remorse is felt in giving the same to another. Thus they dress out numbers with their promises, and smile to see them mistake their livery for finery.

We usually find men of this disposition among those, who are already furnished with a competent, if not an affluent, share of what the world calls happiness. Are they then too much employed in the enjoyment of their own good, to be really solicitous in advancing the good of others? or, do they aim only at bribing the enmity of the world by fair professions, not caring to purchase its friendship by real services? But, surely, it is a weak heart, that cannot step forth from its own enjoyments,

enjoyments, to assist the happiness of others; and as weak a judgment, that leads men to think themselves secure, by tying up the enmity of the world, when there is no condition but what feels, and may want, the benefit of an active friendship from it. The happiest condition is precarious; and those only stand the longest, which are the last assaulted by adversity. A prudent man, in the best state, will make provision for the worst; and, whilst he has it in his power to purchase real esteem from mankind by real services, will lay up a store of friendship, against a time when he may want it. As for those who would purchase the friendship, or at least would bribe the enmity, of the world, by fair professions only, the best that can be said of their bargain is—they pay a trifle, and they purchase one: mere profession of friendship will purchase only mere profession of esteem; the real esteem of the heart can never rise to thank the unmeaning friendship of the tongue.

II. There is another employment, in which dissimulated friendship is engaged, when it leads us to an execution of our professions, but no further, and with no other view, than the answering some ends of our own.

Men of this turn may do real services, but they fall short of the character of true friends, because they act not upon the principle of friendship; they do not, so properly, serve another, as make use of another's good to serve themselves. Not that it is wrong so to do;—to make ourselves happy, by making others so;—it is the general condition of our nature; and we are put in each other's way for that purpose, to be mutually used as instruments in promoting each other's good. But the blame lies here—when the principle that leads us to do good to others is no other than a desire of serving ourselves; for then what we do is an action, not of friendship, but of prudence. The love of our friend, and the love of ourselves, are affections as distinct as the objects on which they are employed; and though they may often operate together, yet they are distinguishable, and that by the end at which they aim. The love of our friend distinguishes itself by our aiming at his good, as its ultimate end; but when we carry our views farther, and only take in his good, as subservient to our own, it is plainly the love of ourselves that influences the action, and the good we do another is no more

more than an accident that falls in our way.

It may be no easy matter to guard against this sort of dissimulation, and it may perhaps seem too strict a remark upon it. We must form our judgments by the actions of men, and cannot always look far enough to see the real inward principle which conducts them; we therefore must allow him to be a true friend, who claims that title upon real services, whatever may be the unknown motive on which he did them. There is no contradicting this—and yet there is this mischief arising from it, that, so long as we know the general necessity which mankind are under of judging by this rule, we are apt to grow careless of acting by any other, and, as improper motives of action cannot well be discerned, we grow less solicitous for acting upon proper ones.

Would we impartially consult our own sentiments, in the discharge of many duties of friendship, we might find reason to own, that there are actions, which we are well content to hear ranked under that sacred title, which yet do not properly deserve it; and if we seriously pursue the reflection, we must be sensible, that the blindness of others

in giving us a character we do not deserve, does us as much mischief as it does us honour : such success encourages the growth of a selfish principle, which is naturally luxuriant : a successful practice in serving our own interest, carried on under the reputation of serving our friends, may in time make us too fond of the former, to pay any regard to the other : when we have long made it a rule to promote the good of others, only as an instrument in promoting our own, we may in time as readily promote their mischief, when we see it conducive to the same favourite end.—This leads me to

III. A third employment, in which dissembled friendship is engaged, when, under the profession of advancing the good of others, men make use of the means and confidence reposed in them for a contrary purpose, and work the mischief of others by those steps, through which they pretend to lead them to their advantage.

It is a sufficient reproach to our nature, as men, and to our condition, as Christians, to contrive the unhappiness of others by any means ; but it is a much higher reproach to both, when our contrivances are so laid, as
to

to make others the instruments of their own mischief.

By whatever fatality it comes about, we are always better guarded against others, than we are against ourselves; and the caution which leads us to suspect others, is generally attended with a confidence which betrays us to ourselves.

In consequence of this general foible in our judgment, it will be a general rule with those who intend us mischief, to profess themselves our friends; because by this means they get possession of us — we put ourselves in their keeping; and if we were not inclined to suspect our own conduct before, we are less likely to suspect it now, when we have persuaded ourselves that we are under the protection of another, of whose judgment we entertain perhaps a better opinion than we have of our own. Every one sees the advantage which the false friend has from this important trust. In this situation we mistake his judgment for our own, and think we only give our own wishes birth when we give approbation to his proposals; and, whilst we are fondly persuaded that we think and act in him, we are not very likely to censure or suspect what he directs. This situation

necessarily makes us an easy prey ; and, as it makes him an easy spoiler, so it makes him a cruel one ;—for what can excuse him in the character of a man, who makes another undeservedly miserable ? or what can save his character as a Christian, who returns the basest sort of enmity for friendship ?

To conclude.—Friendship is a sacred post, in which (if I may be allowed the bold expression) God dignifies man with his vicergerency. Whoever feels it in his power to be a friend to others, may look upon himself as honoured with a commission from God, to co-operate with him in his general design of doing good ; nor are such abilities of being a friend to others greater marks of favour and honour, than they are directions of duty ; and when we are called to give an account of our commission, we shall fall under the character of unthrifty stewards, if, like the talent in the napkin, we return them unemployed.

But under what character shall we fall, if we return them much abused ? If those means, which God hath lent us for the assistance and service of others, be employed, not only for promoting our own wrong ends, but for disappointing the reasonable ends of others ?

So reputable as is the post of friendship, it is no wonder, that many are desirous of being ranked in it, who are not qualified to fill it; but, so sacred as is the post of friendship, it is matter of wonder (of concern at least) that those who are called up to it, and are qualified to fill it, should with so much indifference desert or prostitute it—that they should so easily satisfy themselves with an unmeaning barren profession of it, or, without remorse, allow themselves in a selfish dishonourable practice of it—that they should so cruelly, as well as profanely, misapply the sacred post they are in, by inviting others to trust the means of their happiness in their hands for its improvement, when they are not only not disposed to apply them, but are industrious to abuse and misapply them. Men know not how to guard themselves against such enemies to God and to mankind, till their mischief, perhaps their ruin, makes them feel their mistake. So long as the heart of man lies buried from the eye of man, we must run a hazard with each other, and venture our happiness in each other's hands; but the necessity of this conduct aggravates the guilt of those, who are disposed to betray us by it. To make the necessary behaviour of an-
X other

other the means of any inconvenience to him, is base and ungenerous, even in the lightest matters; but where friendship is concerned, and such happiness as this world can afford us is depending, it is unmanly, it is unchristian.—God knows, the happiness which this world can afford us, is poor enough at best, even after all the assistance we can give each other for procuring and maintaining it;—surely then we should not contrive to make it still more imperfect, by laying treachery and malice in each other's way, to disturb and to destroy the little enjoyment allotted us here below.

Let the false friend, if he can, consider this.—If his heart be open to any thing besides his own interest, let him look around him on the mischief he is doing others, and be ashamed; or, if his heart will admit no consideration, but what leads to his own interest, let him look forward, on the mischief he is doing himself, and be affrightened. Let him seriously consider, whether the disappointments and unhappiness of others, in which he sports himself, on which he fattens here, are circumstances that will secure him his own happiness hereafter:—or, whether it be not reasonable to suspect, if there

there be a God who judgeth the earth, that the treacherous wiles he lays for others may at last ensnare himself;—that the smooth speeches, by which he beguiles his neighbour, may be heavily repaid with a dreadful sentence against himself, from an angry, but righteous judge;—and, that every instance of mischief, which he works for the innocent here, may recoil upon himself, and sink him deeper in his own destruction hereafter.

S E R M O N LXXXIX.

THE PROPER METHOD OF GIVING
REPROOF.

MATTHEW vii. 5.

*First cast out the beam out of thine own eye,
and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the
mote out of thy brother's eye.*

BEFORE we attempt to correct the faults of others, we should take care to amend our own: without this, our reproof is but hypocrisy, and, whilst it pretends a regard for virtue, is no more than the uncharitable suggestion of a bad disposition. Yet nothing is more frequent than this practice, and use hath so reconciled us to it, that we scarce think it wrong, but when we feel it ourselves.

‘Know thyself,’ is said to be a precept from heaven; it is of various application, and may
be

be not improperly directed to those who are more busy about the faults of others, than mindful of their own. He who studies to know himself, will find but little time for busying himself in the knowledge of others, and will show more charity in the use of such knowledge of them as falls in his way.

It is hard to say, what would be an effectual means for stopping this practice—perhaps there is none designed; it is a blemish in the human constitution; but, as it may be useful in quickening a jealous care of our behaviour, it may be left to stand, like many hideous parts of nature, for its subserviency to what is more agreeable and more useful.

Reproof is a difficult and delicate work; yet every one attempts it. There are particular qualifications, and particular seasons, necessary, before we can set about it with sufficient authority, or with any view of success; yet, with no other authority than our own inclination, and with no better view than the gratifying it, we call the characters of others before us, upon the slightest occasion, and treat them with a severity which always attends usurpation; for, where we have a right to examine the behaviour of others, we usually shew more candour;—our censures are always

the most severe, where they have the least right to support them.

This is one qualification necessary for giving reproof; and it is as easy to distinguish where we have a right to give it, as it is unjust to assume it, where we have none. We are not likely to be ignorant of the authority belonging to our several stations;—for it is wisely ordered, that there is set up, in several parts of mankind, an authority for correcting those irregularities, which, if left without controul, would throw all into confusion. Thus a master hath authority over his servants, a parent over his children, and a magistrate over the subject; and it is as much a duty for each of these to exert that authority, with which their stations invest them, as it is the duty of those to submit to it, who are placed under them.

Yet even in these cases (as reproof is always disagreeable) those who feel it will be ready to lay hold of any thing to shake the authority on which it proceeds; which, therefore, should be well supported—and its best support is example;—if that be wanting, reproof, though it brings command, brings no lesson with it, and we rather *submit* to it than are *mended* by it. Men are more attentive

tentive to example than precept; and, when reproof and practice are contrary, we do more mischief by the latter, than we do good by the former. The actions of men are the rule by which we judge of their thoughts:—true, it is not an infallible rule;—but, so long as it is the common one, it must be attended to; and we must expect, if our reproof and behaviour be opposite, that men will, from the deficiency of the latter, suspect the sincerity of the former, and will conclude, that we are not ourselves possessed of that regard for what is right which we seem so earnest to instill into others; consequently, our advice will want a material recommendation to make it successful: or, if our sincerity be not suspected, this mends not the weakness of our reproof; for it is the same thing, whether we advise what we do not think useful, or what we do not practise—and our want of sincerity, or our want of practice, are equally destructive of that weight which reproof should carry with it in order to be successful. Besides, the want of example not only weakens reproof, but disgraces ourselves; and shews, that we are either blind or hardened; that we are not convinced of our own faults, or that we can maintain them against conviction:
either

either of which conditions disqualifies us for reproving others; for, how can we call that a fault in another, which we do not think one in ourselves? or, how can we seriously desire to remove that fault in another, which we will not remove in ourselves?

All this should be well considered, even in those instances of reproof, where there is a right to support it. The magistrate, the parent, or the master, and whatever other character in society may invest us with this authority, will always find their own example the most effectual support and recommendation of their reproof: not that their authority should be set at nought for want of such example; for the authority arises from the office, which is blameless; the faults are the faults of the man: such reproof, therefore, is too well supported to be despised, though it be not well enough supported to produce that consistency in it, which renders it both amiable and effectual.

But in those instances, where we have no right or authority to reprove, it is highly unpardonable to correct others, when our own behaviour stands in need of the like correction. If our reproof wants authority to support it, we should surely be careful to add

to the strength of the other pillar, on which it depends, and give it all the recommendation that is possible from our own example. But here lies the mischief, that, among such as have no authority for reproofing others, those are the most forward in doing it, who have the least good behaviour of their own to shew. — When correction comes from this quarter, it must encrease rather than abate disorder; for, when such shake the scourge over us, who not only have no right to take it up, but deserve it themselves, justice and self-defence allow us to wrest it from their hands.

There are, besides suitable qualifications, suitable seasons for reproof; which is as unpardonable, when ill-timed, as when ill-supported. There is no doubt, but, if we really intend the reformation of the party, who is the object of our reproof, he will be the first, and he will be the last, before whom we lay it; because it is not necessary, for the amendment of one man's conduct, that all men should be judges of it; and we commonly find, that such as enter upon this work on true principles, that is, with proper authority; with the countenance of their own good conduct, and with a sincere view to the
interest

interest of the person for whom they are concerned ; such, I say, as undertake to reprove upon these principles, usually take care of this circumstance, and, as reformation is the only point they have in view, they suffer their reproof to take no larger steps than are necessary for that single purpose.

But when reproof wants its true principles to guide and to restrain it, it always runs beyond its limits. It seizes all opportunities as proper, and every occasion of speech is a season for throwing out our reproof. Men of this humour are so far from taking care, that he, who is the object of their censure, should be the only one acquainted with it, that they take care he shall be the only one who is ignorant of it. Conscious that their reproof wants its proper support, they dare not set it before him, whose business it is to give it due examination ; but, watching his absence, they spread their unlicensed censure before all they meet ; and, as the point they have in view is not his reformation, but the indulgence of their own humour, the more they make acquainted with it, the better they answer their purpose.

This is the most common method which is taken in finding fault with the behaviour

of others; it is not usual to lay men's follies before them, unless we have some authority over them to support us, or such a regard for them as will excuse us; to do it without either of these, is a liberty which common sense and common good manners will not allow, however common practice has established it: when we dare not lay men's follies before themselves, we lay them before the public, and set censure on its progress abroad, instead of applying private and personal reproof at home.

This liberty, which is usually taken in publicly censuring each other's conduct, is certainly unreasonable and unchristian; and, whatever may be alledged to justify it, or however general practice may countenance it, yet, upon examination, it will be found to be base in its principles, and mischievous in its consequences.

The true principle of censure is envy, though it may often take occasion of shewing itself upon motives of a less odious nature. Self-love makes us uneasy to see others better than ourselves; and consequently ready to lay hold of any opportunity of degrading another, as a necessary step to our own advancement. This disposition leads us to entertain

tain accounts of other men's failings, because the application of them to ourselves gives us the secret pleasure of admiring our own strength, if we stand clear of the like faults; and if we do not, it gives us a no less pleasing satisfaction in the discovery that others are as weak as we are; for partnership in folly, as well as in affliction, is a relief; the latter, indeed, lightens affliction, but the former strengthens folly. On these accounts, we are fond of hearing the misconduct of others; and what gives pleasure in the hearing, gives as great in communicating it.

Besides envy, there are purposes of vanity, which are served in propagating censure. It is the humour of many to indulge their wit in the notice they take of other men's failings; — this is a very active principle of censure; — the pleasure in being witty is irresistible — and, though true wit be the talent of but few, yet they are fewer still, who think they have not wit enough to laugh at their neighbours.

The maintaining conversation leads many into this practice. It is a prevailing notion, that censure is a sure topic of entertainment; and experience too much shews it is so; and though some, who give into it upon this prin-

ciple, may *mean* no harm, yet they *do* a great deal; and their not being aware of it, is a circumstance, which only shews their want of a good understanding, but does not excuse their want of good-nature. — Thus envy, pride, vanity, and ill-nature, are the principles of a censorious behaviour; and, though motives of a more favourable nature may often be the immediate occasion of discovering it, yet, whoever will impartially examine his heart, will find more or less of these principles at the bottom of every inclination to censure.

From principles so bad, general good consequences cannot follow. It is true, public censure may sometimes be a check on our conduct, and keep us within bounds:—as there is nothing so good but what may be abused to evil, so there is nothing so bad but some good may arise from it; but such good effect, arising from censure, is overbalanced by the mischief it works.

The mischief which they suffer, who are the object of it, is severe and irreparable. The greatest poverty in life is want of reputation, and they who rob us of that are the worst of plunderers. Nor is the mischief of censure confined to those who are the objects of it;

but, as he who burns his neighbour's house endangers his own, so those who raise or propagate censure, may fall under it. The world is not more ready to censure, than it is to ask this question, "Who art thou, that judgest another?" and the discovery arising from this question may turn greatly to our disadvantage.—To have the judgment we pass upon others recoil upon ourselves, is the severest punishment of censure.

To conclude.—There is no temper of mind more useful or agreeable, than that which inclines us to love, rather than find fault with, each other. Such a disposition is the support of social life. A severe enquiry into blemishes alienates the affections, encourages jealous fear, and establishes mutual hatred. On the contrary, by a mild treatment of other men's conduct, we not only bespeak the like for our own, but we take the best step for their amendment.—Good-nature is a necessary ingredient in good advice; and he shews most skill, who shews most love, in the care of his neighbour's conduct.—Let us remember, that we are men, and that we are Christians; as men, we are all liable to failings, and as Christians, we should be ready to forgive them.—Whoever would walk worthy of society, and as

caring for himself, will not provoke a rigid inspection into his own conduct, by a busy and severe enquiry into the conduct of others; and whoever would walk worthy of the holy vocation wherewith he is called, as a disciple of Christ, will shew that forbearance towards others, of which Christ hath set him the example, and will be ready to forgive his brother, as God, for Christ's sake, is ready to forgive us all.

To conclude.—There is no temper of mind more useful or agreeable, than that which inclines us to love, rather than find fault with, each other. Such a disposition is the support of social life. A severe enquiry into blame, as alienates the affections, encourages jealous fear, and establishes mutual hatred. On the contrary, by a mild treatment of other men's conduct, we not only bestow the like for our own, but we take the best way for their amendment.—Good nature is a necessary ingredient in good advice; and he shews most skill, who shews most love, in the care of his neighbour's conduct.—Let us remember, that we are all liable to failings, and as Christians, we are all ready to forgive them.—Who would walk worthy of society, and be

SERMON

S E R M O N X C.

THE GOSPEL DUTY OF FORGIVENESS.

M A T T H E W XVIII. 35.

So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

FORGIVENESS is a duty with which philosophy knew little what to do: and, though it really has a place in the human breast, yet it has hardly found a place among the lessons of human morality.

The truth is, though forgiveness be really a natural duty, yet, within the narrow limits of human philosophy, there were not found sufficient motives to support the practice of it.

The common imperfection of human nature, and the mutual need of forgiveness arising

ing from it, might point out, that there was such a duty belonging to man; but this was too weak a motive to secure the observance of it, because it was not strong enough to overbalance the natural passion of revenge; a passion more prevalent in the breast of man than a disposition to forgive. So long as men felt themselves governed by this passion (as they must, so long as they felt nothing strong enough to oppose it) they would easily overlook the natural duty of mutual forgiveness; and, instead of making a provision for any future security by the use of it, would trust to their own strength for supporting themselves in such offences as they might hereafter give, rather than forego the pleasure of being revenged for such as they had already received.

So far were the Heathens from feeling any thing strong enough to oppose the natural desire of revenge, that they lived and acted under a perpetual encouragement of it: for, being utter strangers to the glories of heaven, they bent all their attention to such glory as they could meet with on earth; and that glory being such as ambition and pride set before them, and which was generally built on the disturbance and destruction of their fellow-

fellow-creatures, it is no wonder that we find their philosophers at a loss in recommending meekness and forgiveness as a duty: since this would have been a lesson utterly inconsistent with the ruling passion of the world about them—utterly opposite to that disturbance and destruction of each other, on which they raised their greatest glory; which, therefore, the wisest philosophers had no authority to bid them lay aside, because they knew not where to give them a better glory in exchange for it.

We may therefore well call the duty of forgiveness a gospel duty: not that it is only there to be met with; but because there only it is placed on such principles as may support the practice of it, on such motives for observing it, as the Heathen could not find, but which the Christian cannot overlook.—Such as,

I. The command of Christ.—This motive the Heathen was utterly unacquainted with. He might often find it useful, and might sometimes even feel it pleasant, to forgive; but he knew of no command to do it, and consequently was not likely to do it any farther than he found it useful or felt it pleasant: but if (which would more frequently happen) he felt a pleasure from pursuing his revenge, he knew of no command, no authority

ity sufficient to stop him in the pursuit. This authority the Christian has met with—God himself, who made the heart of man, has, by the mouth of his Son, put a restraint on the passions belonging to it; and the Christian, whenever he feels a desire of revenge arising in his heart, feels at the same time what is sufficient to overbalance that desire, from the authority of his God and Saviour, who has expressly commanded him to suppress it.

2. Another motive, on which the gospel calls us to the duty of forgiveness, is the example of God.

The conduct of God, in dispensing the natural blessings of his Providence to the wicked as well as to the good, shews us a lesson of doing good to those who hate us. Our Saviour expressly directs us to look upon it as such, and commands us to imitate it; and by his direction and command we are both encouraged and obliged so to do. Whether the Heathen, who knew nothing of this direction and command of Christ, felt himself under sufficient obligation of doing so too, is doubtful at best. Under the very imperfect knowledge which the Heathens had of God and his Providence, the promiscuous dispensation of his natural blessings to the wicked as well as to the good, was rather an argument for denying
than

than for imitating him ; and there was surely need of a Divine revelation to set this matter in its true light ; to shew that to be goodness in the Governor of the world, which otherwise might appear to be a want of justice.— Though a studious sage or two might tell the world about them, that it was a reasonable duty to imitate God, so far as his conduct lay open to view and imitation, the world would not contradict, neither, on the other hand, would it mind them much: even the sages themselves might feel difficulties on this point which they could not well remove. So little as they saw of the ways and will of God, and so poorly as they reasoned even about what they did see, they could never, with sufficient conviction and authority, tell the world about them, *when, how, or why* they ought to imitate the Divine conduct. A revelation doubtless was necessary to set this matter likewise in its proper light, to shew our obligation of imitating the Divine conduct: a revelation which should more fully unfold the ways and designs of Providence with respect to man ; and, after shewing us the general reasons of the Divine conduct, should command us to imitate what it had first explained. This revelation the Christian
has

has before him ; he sees God's conduct explained, and thereby hears his own directed : he sees, beyond all doubt, from the instructions of revelation, that the goodness of God, in the promiscuous distribution of his blessings to mankind, is a lesson fit for him to imitate, and, from the command of Christ, he feels, beyond all contradiction, that it is a lesson which he is obliged to imitate.

But the example of God goes farther than the promiscuous dispensation of his natural blessings—which, indeed, shews us a lesson of being kind to all, even the ungrateful : but it is another part of God's example which shews us the lesson of forgiving those who have offended us ; and that is, his forgiveness of mankind through his Son Christ Jesus. This part of God's example the Heathen could not see ; but the Christian has it full before him : and this is the main principle on which our Saviour has set the duty of mutual forgiveness—Because God hath forgiven us, therefore we ought to forgive each other.

Christ may well command us to forgive each other on his own bare will and authority, and every good Christian will own himself bound by such command ; but when he commands us to do this, because God hath forgiven

us,

us, he shews a reason, as well as authority, for the command—and it is our duty to attend to both.

When Christ makes God's forgiveness of us a reason why we should forgive each other, it must be supposed, that there is some relation or connection between God's conduct towards mankind, and the conduct of mankind towards each other ; for, if there was no relation or connection between the one and the other, the one could not be made a reason for the other.

This relation will easily shew itself, upon asking this plain question—Why was God so ready to forgive mankind ? Plainly, to make them happy. They were created for happiness ; and that happiness depending on the power and will of God, God forgave them the offence by which they had forfeited it, rather than they should lose it. This is God's conduct towards mankind ; which carries with it not only a direction for the conduct of mankind towards each other, but an obligation for pursuing it : for, if God proposes the happiness of mankind, it is not for man to counteract such purpose : on the contrary, he is indispensably obliged to co-operate towards it ; and to bend all his attention and ability to-
wards

wards promoting what he discovers to be the will and design of God: and, when he sees God, in pursuit of his general purpose, ready to forgive mankind their offences against him, rather than they shall lose the happiness which he has in his power for them, he sees, at the same time, a reason why man, who is obliged to co-operate with God's purposes, should do the same, by forgiving his fellow-creatures their offences against him, rather than they shall lose so much of their happiness as lies in his hands to communicate to them. For God has so ordered the happiness of man, that he has not only made it dependant on his own will and power, as the supreme cause of it; but has also made it, in part, dependant on the will and power of man, as a subordinate cause of it. The happiness belonging to man in another life, which is his supreme happiness, God reserves wholly in his own hands; but the happiness belonging to man in this life, is left much in the hands of man, and depends greatly on our conduct towards each other. We daily see and feel how much it is in our power to promote or hinder this part of each other's happiness, by acts of kindness or by acts of injury: therefore, Christ has expressly commanded

manded us to be kind towards each other, and as expressly forbid us to injure one another: and what is this but enjoining us to co-operate with the general will of Providence, in contributing what lies in our power towards promoting the happiness of our fellow-creatures, and in withholding what lies in our power for disturbing it? Now, as we are capable of disturbing the happiness of others by injuring them, so our own is liable to be disturbed by the punishment accruing from such conduct; and therefore, the same authority which has commanded us not to injure each other, has likewise commanded us to forgive each other: doubtless for the same reason; because both punishment and injury are alike destructive of their happiness on whom they fall; which it is our duty to promote (in obedience to God's general purpose of making men happy); and therefore we ought (in imitation of his particular mercy to mankind) to forgive the offences of our fellow-creatures, rather than destroy that part of their happiness, which we have in our power for them, as God forgave mankind their offences, rather than they should lose the happiness which he designed them for.

3. There remains another motive on which the gospel sets the duty of mutual forgiveness before us; and that is—that our forgiveness of others is made the *condition* on which we are to receive forgiveness from God.

Men may sometimes perhaps be inclined to think themselves not much concerned about the rules which God lays down for his conduct, and may account it doubtful reasoning, to infer what man ought to do, from what God is pleased to do; but they can never think themselves not concerned about their own happiness, or account it doubtful reasoning to infer that to be the duty of man, which God has appointed as the condition on which he must obtain his happiness.

This principle in support of the duty of forgiveness, as it arises entirely from the foregoing, must be as unknown to the Heathen as that was. If the Heathen saw not the great example of God's forgiving mankind, neither could he know the law which was founded on that example, and which made the forgiveness of others the condition of our obtaining forgiveness for ourselves.

The authority of this law the Christian cannot dispute: and the equity of it is as
clear

clear as the authority is strong. For, when God was pleased to forgive mankind, rather than they should lose the happiness he designed them for, what more suitable than that he should appoint proper means for the security of what he was so desirous should not be lost? What more reasonable than that he should require each man, in his conduct, not to thwart, but to co-operate with him towards promoting the happiness of mankind? And, what method so effectual for obliging men to do this, as by making each man's own happiness dependant upon his study and readiness for promoting the happiness of others? To this purpose, Christ, who came to work our reconciliation with God, has made all our hope and consolation, arising from that gracious work, to depend most emphatically upon our discharge of the duty of mutual forgiveness; bidding us be reconciled with our brethren, if ever we hope to have God reconciled to us:—and, not only the general privilege of obtaining pardon from God, but the privilege of obtaining any blessing we ask for at his hands by prayer, is made to depend upon it—"When ye stand praying, forgive."—The glorious privilege of being the sons of God depends upon it; and our claim, through

Christ, as heirs of eternal life, is built upon it.

These then are the motives on which the gospel sets the duty of forgiveness before us : and Christians are called upon to forgive each other, not only by the common imperfection of human nature, which makes it mutually needful, but also by the command of Christ, who has enjoined us to concur with the general purpose of God in promoting the happiness of mankind ; and consequently to follow his example in forgiving offences, rather than destroy that happiness by resenting them : and this command Christ farther enforces, by making our obedience to it the *condition* on which we are to expect forgiveness of ourselves, and every other blessing, both here and hereafter, at the hands of God.— Whatever notions the heathen world might have of this duty, they were certainly destitute of these motives to enforce the practice of it ; and, for want of them, felt not a weight sufficient to overbalance the natural desire of revenge. And, though it is but too true, that these motives (strong as they are) are not strong enough to keep all Christians so quiet as they should be, yet it is to be hoped they have in general a suitable good effect

effect among us : and, for such as are regardless of them, and will pursue revenge in spite of such motives to the contrary, they only shew themselves to be worse than Heathens, but prove nothing against the sufficiency of the motives they reject. For, it is the case of all religious principles or motives, that they are really sufficient to keep men good, though numbers chuse to make themselves otherwise: they are sufficient, if men will use them and attend to them; but, so long as God has left men the natural liberty of using or not using what he sets before them, of obeying or not obeying his commands, there is no command, however strongly enforced, can come from the mouth of God, but the heart of man will dare to contradict it.

Thus much for the *motives* on which the gospel calls us to the duty of mutual forgiveness. In my next discourse I shall proceed to consider what this duty requires.

S E R M O N XCI.

The same Subject continued.

LUKE xvii. 3, 4.

*If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him;
and if he repent, forgive him.*

*And if he trespass against thee seven times in
a day, and seven times in a day turn again
to thee, saying, I repent—thou shalt forgive
him.*

IN a former discourse, I briefly set forth the motives on which the gospel calls us to the duty of mutual forgiveness:—and it is not to be supposed, that a duty so forcibly recommended to us can possibly require from us any thing that is inconsistent with the maintenance of our just rights, or that can hurt either private or public safety; whatever some may insinuate, who, from a want of religion,

L 4

quarrel

quarrel with the gospel, or, from a want of good-nature, quarrel with this duty contained in it.

It appears from the words I have just now read to you, that the duty of mutual forgiveness requires, that we should forgive each other's trespasses upon repentance, and that without limitation to a few or any number of times—but as often as such trespasses, attended with such repentance, shew themselves before us,

You see the duty of forgiveness is placed upon the condition of the offender's repentance. We will first, then, consider the duty in this light, as actually having such condition before it; and will lay down a few observations on the repentance of the offender, and on the forgiveness due from the party offended.

1. We may well expect to find this condition of repentance laid down as a requisite towards obtaining forgiveness of each other, since it is so expressly enjoined as a requisite towards obtaining forgiveness from God. We are to forgive each other, not only *because*, but *as*, God forgiveth us. God's forgiveness of us requires our repentance; therefore our forgiveness of a brother requires his repentance.

If

If we must deal forgiveness to a brother, because we ourselves receive it from God, the same equity will entitle us to expect repentance from a brother, because we ourselves pay it to God.

2. It is to be observed, that this repentance of the offender must be sincere. We well know, that a formal acknowledgment of our own sins, without a real sorrow for them, and as real a resolution of avoiding them, is not the repentance on which we can expect forgiveness from God; therefore, neither is it the repentance on which an offender can reasonably demand forgiveness from us. A formal acknowledgment of an offence, without any meaning in it, is itself an additional offence.

3. We may observe, that an offender must shew the sincerity of his repentance by such behaviour as naturally and justly belongs to it, and which he has it in his power to produce. It is easy for a man to say he is sorry; and if he is truly so, it will be as natural for him to shew it, as it is easy for him to say it. He will naturally be desirous of making reparation for his offence, so far as lies in his power; under which disposition, the less he finds himself able to do, the more diligently will

will he set himself about what he can do. This sort of behaviour, as it naturally belongs to the repentance of an offender, so is it reasonably to be expected from it. It is a necessary part of our own repentance before God, to repair, as far as we can, the mischief which has accrued from our past sins; which, though it is not done by way of reparation to God, who suffers no injury from our sins, yet is it expected to attend our repentance, because it naturally belongs to it, and is the best proof we can give that our repentance is sincere. With respect then to an offending brother, if we may require his repentance, we must require a proper proof of it; but, when a man says he is sorry for the offence he has committed, and yet shews no sort of advance, not even a desire of making reparation, what does this prove, but that all he says is false? Does he shew a proof, on which we ought to believe that his repentance is sincere? It is true, "charity believeth all things;" but not things incredible, sure. Charity does not deprive us of common sense, or oblige us to believe a thing to be true upon such conduct as shews it to be false. If then an offender is obliged to repentance, he is obliged to shew a desire of making reparation to
the

the best of his power; because that is a natural and necessary proof that his repentance is sincere:—which, if it be, he will shew that and more: he will not only be desirous of making reparation for what is past, but will be careful not to repeat it, and as desirous to shew himself so. For he who makes reparation of a past offence, with an intent to commit it again, is guilty of the same mockery and insult, as he who says he is sorry for an offence, but is not desirous of making reparation for it. We all know how material a part of our repentance before God it is, for past sins, to form hearty resolutions against the future repetition of them, and how grievously we affront God, to tell him with our lips, that we are sorry for those sins, which, in our hearts, we are still purposing to commit. If such a circumstance destroys the sincerity of our repentance before God, it equally destroys the sincerity of that repentance which an offending brother is obliged to shew towards us; and therefore, every offender, who does sincerely repent, will as naturally endeavour, by all suitable means, to discover his good resolutions for the future, as he will to give a suitable proof of the sincerity of his sorrow for what is past.—And, where such repentance

ance

ance comes forth from an offending brother, forgiveness from the offended party should go forth to meet it.

Concerning which, some observations may be made, answerable to those which have already been made on the repentance of the offender. As,

1. That there is the same reason and authority for the offending party to expect forgiveness after he repents, as there is for the offended party to expect repentance before he forgives. God is the example in both cases. As he makes repentance in us a requisite in suing for his pardon, so he makes it too a reason for granting it. Therefore, as we expect repentance from an offending brother, because we must pay it to God, so we must deal forgiveness to a brother upon his repentance, because upon our repentance we receive forgiveness from God.

2. It is to be observed, that this forgiveness should be sincere. If the party offended has a right to expect a sincere repentance from the offender, he, in return, on performance of such repentance, has a right to expect as sincere a forgiveness from him; and, in truth, there is as much danger of fraud in the one case as in the other; men being usually as treacherous

treacherous in giving pardon as they are in asking it, if not more so. But, as a formal acknowledgment of an offence, without any meaning, is an additional offence, so a formal declaration of forgiveness, without any meaning, is cruel hypocrisy, and makes the offended party by much the greater transgressor.

3. We may observe, that, as in the case of repentance, so in the case of forgiveness, we must shew the sincerity of it by such behaviour as naturally belongs to it. One man may as easily say, I forgive, as another may say, I am sorry, and mean as little by it; but if he is sincere, he will as naturally shew his forgiveness as an offender who is sincere will shew his repentance.

The behaviour which naturally belongs to the forgiveness of another, shews itself in two principal circumstances—a remittance of the punishment, and a restitution to past favour. Now, supposing the offender to shew such repentance as has been described, he has a right to both; for they are the natural proofs of forgiveness, and he has a right to expect them upon shewing the natural proofs of his own repentance.

1. With respect to a remittance of the punishment, there are doubtless many instances where

where it may not be proper to remit the punishment, however penitent the offender may be. A magistrate, for instance, sees it reasonable to execute a criminal, or otherwise punish him, however penitent he may be : and many such like instances there are belonging to human government. But such instances fall not within the duty we are considering, which cannot be supposed to extend itself to cases of government, either public or private ; because, if it did, it would destroy all government, and set even Christ's own directions at variance with each other. The duty of forgiveness is set to restrain men's passions, but is not intended to frustrate their common or their civil prudence. The gospel found men in society, and under the several governments belonging to it—and so it leaves them : the duties it recommends are well calculated to improve, not to destroy, what it found ; and the duty of forgiveness, after restraining the private passions of men, leaves cases of government, whether public or private, to be directed by proper reasons of government. But in cases of ordinary and private offence, it is surely reasonable, that ill-will on one side, and anger on the other, should drop together ; and, consequently, that the effects
of

of both should cease together; otherwise, if, after a due repentance has removed the offence, an undue anger still inflicts the punishment, the offended party becomes the transgressor, and is guilty of a cruel mockery if he declares forgiveness, whilst he inflicts the punishment.

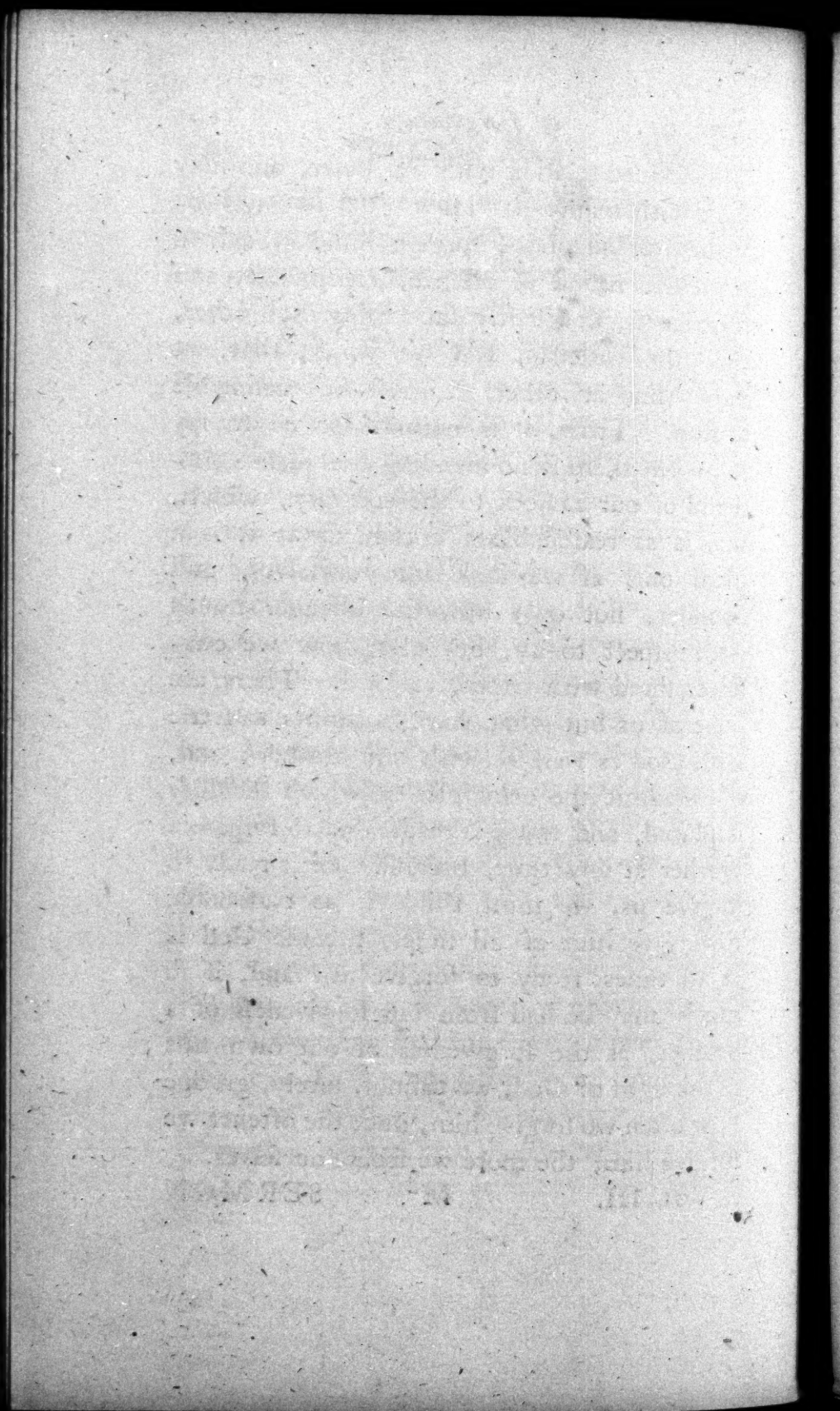
2. With respect to a restitution to past favour, it seems reasonable, that, as on the one hand the offender must set himself to a reparation of past mischief, *as far as he is able*, as a necessary proof that his repentance is sincere; so, on the other hand, the party forgiving should shew a restitution to past favour, *as far as is reasonable*, as a necessary proof that his forgiveness is sincere. I say, as far as is reasonable, rather than as far as he is able; because, in many instances, where it may be our duty to forgive a man, it may be a fault to replace him in all respects just as he was before. As I observed just now, though "charity believeth all things," yet it is not to be expected it should believe things utterly incredible; so, though "charity endureth all things," yet it does not oblige us to endure things utterly intolerable. No; as charity is not intended to set aside common sense, so neither is it intended to set aside common prudence, but should itself be directed by both:

both : and therefore, in such cases where a compleat restitution of the offender manifestly endangers our own or others reasonable welfare, it is a duty of prudence, and no breach of the duty of Christian forgiveness, to forbear it. But in all other cases, a restitution to past favour seems as necessary in the party forgiving, as a reparation of past mischief is necessary in the party repenting. If the latter has a right to the forgiveness of the other, he has a right to the natural proofs of it; but if the other barely says, I forgive, and yet withholds all former instances of favour, even such as may reasonably and safely be restored, what does he prove by this, but that he does not forgive him?—When man's offence had forfeited the happiness of heaven, and God, for the merits of Christ, forgave him, was it no more than a reprieve from punishment? Is it not a full restitution to the happiness he had lost?

It appears then, that the duty before us requires a full and hearty forgiveness to be shewn towards a full and hearty repentance.—But it is farther required of us, in the discharge of this duty, that we shew such forgiveness *as often* as ever such repentance shews itself before us, however often that may be.

This

This seemed to stick with St. Peter, and may stick with many. “How oft shall my brother offend and I forgive him?” Such a perpetual round of offence, repentance, and forgiveness, constantly succeeding each other, tires the patience, and we think, that, at some time or other, it must be reasonable to stop. Truly, it is natural for us to say so;—but there is no avoiding the plain command of our Saviour to the contrary; which, too, is as reasonable a command as it is a plain one, if we look into ourselves, and consider, not only how the offender stands with respect to us; but also, how we ourselves stand with respect to God. There are none of us but what have accounts to settle with God as well as with our brother: and, if we admit the principles on which the duty is placed, and think it reasonable to forgive a brother at any time, because God is ready to forgive us, we must think it as reasonable to forgive him at all times, because God is at all times ready to forgive us: and, if so much may be had from our forgiveness of a brother, as the forgiveness of our own sins in the sight of God, we cannot, surely, grudge how often we forgive him, since the oftener we forgive him, the more we secure ourselves.



S E R M O N X C I I .

The same Subject continued.

L U K E xvii. 3, 4.

*If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him ;
and if he repent, forgive him.*

*And if he trespass against thee seven times in
a day, and seven times in a day turn again
to thee, saying, I repent—thou shalt forgive
him.*

THUS far then we have considered the duty of forgiveness, as having the condition of the offender's repentance clear and full before it: and it appears, that in this light we are obliged sincerely to forgive each other's offences upon their sincere repentance, and that without limitation to a few, or any number of times ; but as often as such offences, attended with such repentance, may shew themselves before us.

M 2

And,

And, surely, this is neither a difficult nor an unreasonable duty : it is a duty which, if some have so little religion or good-nature as to despise, I hope a far greater number have enough of both to practise it with chearfulness.

Yet some would insinuate, that forgiving offenders, merely upon their repentance, is not acting up to the duty we owe society.—We are told by men of warm tempers, who are angry at so much ingratitude and hypocrisy as they see in the world, that such indulgence encourages offences ;—and that the best method of maintaining order, and establishing security in society, is to punish offenders without remission.

We certainly act up best to the duty we owe society, when we pursue such conduct as best promotes the order and security of society. The single point then is, Whether a mutual forgiveness of injuries, such as occur in private life, not under public government—or, a rigid prosecution of them without mercy—best answers this end. Those who maintain the latter, may be told, in a few words, that both reason and fact are against them. For, surely, they reason very strangely, who think that men are thrown into disorder by a disposition which leads them to love one another—or, that they

are securer when they hate and are afraid of each other. But we are told, forgiveness encourages and multiplies offences;—but does not malice and hatred encrease and multiply them more? and does not extreme severity naturally beget malice and hatred among men? It is true, hypocrisy and ingratitude are odious and mischievous qualities; but, are malice and hatred less odious, or less mischievous? With respect to the particular quiet and security of each individual, it is surely true, that a forgiving temper, though it may expose a man to some offences (and what is the conduct which can secure us from all?) yet it bespeaks the general love of those about him, and he feels himself sufficiently easy and safe in the friendship of many, notwithstanding what he suffers from the craft and ingratitude of a few. It is as true, on the other side, that a rigid unforgiving temper, though it guards a man against some offences, yet it exposes him, at the same time, to the general hatred of those about him; and, with all his care, he is far from being easy and safe in terrifying a few from disturbing him, by a method which provokes the enmity of many to rise up against him. With respect to the general quiet and security of the public, it must be

true, that what best promotes it among individuals, best promotes it in general; and, if we appeal to fact, as history shews it us, we find every where, that, in proportion as that spirit prevailed, which promoted fear, hatred, and revenge among men, disorder and destruction reigned with it.

It is not to be supposed that Christ, when he set aside severity and revenge, and recommended forgiveness, intended to set aside what supported society, in order to establish what is destructive of it. Nor in truth did he meddle with society. His aim was to correct the tempers of men; and if he laid a restraint on those passions from whence arise the disorders which most disturb the world, which are the private disorders in common life, he must surely be thought not an enemy, but a friend, to society. He therefore forbid revenge, and enjoined forgiveness, in the ordinary conduct of men towards each other. As to the necessary rules of discipline, by which society is governed and upheld, he left them as he found them; nor did he mean to tie up the hands of the magistrate from the use of them: on the contrary, all his precepts tend towards assisting, rather than obstructing, the magistrate. For, surely, if it
be

be the care and business of the magistrate to keep men quiet, the more men keep themselves so, the easier it is for him. He has less to do indeed; but, I presume, he will not complain of that as an obstruction to his office; but will rather look upon it as a great assistance; and will think, that, whilst men, by mutual forgiveness, keep out of the reach of his arm, they better promote the quiet and order of society than when, by mutual resentments, they pull each other under the weight of it. So long as this authority is left standing to protect the state (and Christ never meant to remove it) he will readily allow men to consult their private mutual quiet, by exerting the right they have, as well as the duty they owe, of mutually forgiving each other.

But the main difficulty is yet behind.—Suppose the condition of the offender's repentance be not so clear and full before us as we have put it; suppose it is doubtful, whether the offender repents or not; nay, suppose it is clear he does not repent—what does the duty of Christian forgiveness then require of us? Are we still to forgive him? That seems to bear hard on human nature. Are we then at li-

berty to pursue him with enmity? That bears as hard against both the example and doctrine of Christ.

Let us consider a little.—In the first place, we may be often doubtful about this matter—An offender may shew such behaviour as will not allow us to think he has no repentance at all, and yet he may not shew enough to satisfy us that it is so sincere and so full as it should be.

Here two things should be especially attended to.

1. We should be careful to remove all obstacles which may hinder us in judging with true equity of an offender's repentance. Pride, revenge, and interest, are great obstacles in this work; and should be carefully shut out of our council, when we sit to judge of the sufficiency of an offender's repentance: they make high demands; and will not allow us to be contented with as much repentance as reasonably satisfies for an offence, without exacting more to satisfy themselves. But an offender, though he is obliged to shew repentance for his fault, yet is by no means obliged to pay homage to the passions of the party he has offended. This is what we
should

should readily allow to be reasonable, in all cases where we are to *give* satisfaction; and therefore we should never forget, that it is no less so in those cases where we are to *receive* it: we should therefore learn to estimate the repentance of an offender, not by what it may be agreeable to us to demand, but by what it is reasonable for him to shew. But if, after all the care we can take of our own judgment, the behaviour of the offending party still leaves us in doubt about the sincerity of his repentance, charity should incline us to the favourable side. This is agreeable to the character of charity, as drawn by the Apostle; which, though it cannot believe and hope for things utterly incredible, yet, where there is once some ground for hope and belief, will rather build too much than too little upon it; and, in matters of doubt, will always believe and hope for the best. A good man, after carefully laying aside what may obstruct his own equitable judgment upon an offender's repentance, will sooner encourage than reject it; and, if it should still prove insincere, he has this reflection to bear him him up—that he has acted charitably; and not only charitably, but wisely too, in chusing rather to incur the censure

sure of men for his want of sagacity, than incur the condemnation of Christ for his want of charity.

Thus much seems reasonable conduct, in cases where it is doubtful whether an offender's repentance be sincere or not. But, what shall we do where it is even clear that he does not repent?

Our Saviour's command directs us to forgive those who repent; but does it direct us not to forgive those who do not repent? No; Christ came to enlarge the duty of forgiveness; and therefore must not be understood as confining it in any degree. His command, in this case, is intended to give the repentant offender a right to our forgiveness, and to enforce our duty on that point; but a command which enforces a duty to any point, does not confine it to that point; nor will it follow, that, because an offending brother has a right to our forgiveness, if he repents, therefore we are obliged not to forgive him if he does not repent: for this would contradict the great example and advice of Christ, in forgiving our very enemies:—from whence we may well conclude, that Christians not only are at liberty to forgive those who do not repent, but that they greatly improve the duty of forgiveness, and

recommend themselves more to the approbation of Christ by so doing.

This is certain, that however unrepentant an offender may shew himself, and in consequence of that may, on his own part, not be entitled to our forgiveness—yet this will not entitle us to pursue him with revenge.

Revenge is that hurt which is done another, to gratify our resentment of the hurt which we conceive he hath done us; and such revenge is usually pursued either by actually inflicting a mischief on the party, or by leaving him exposed to one, by not affording him the common offices of humanity for preventing it. By neither of these methods are we allowed to pursue an offending brother, however unrepentant he may be. Nay, so far are we from being allowed to set our hands at work this way, that we are even forbid to set our thoughts towards it, so as even to wish for mischief on an enemy's head, or to rejoice when we see it fall there.

The testimonies of Scripture in support of this, are too well known to need repeating. What then is to be done? It appears, on the one hand, that if an offending brother repents, he *must* be forgiven. It appears too, that if he does not repent, he *may* be forgiven.

given. He *must not* be pursued with revenge.

And yet, our Saviour's command to forgive an offending brother, if he repents, certainly implies, that some distinction may be made by us in our conduct towards him, if he does not repent. For, why should a distinction be made in the condition of the offender, if no distinction is to follow in our conduct towards him? It is said, "If thy brother repents," which implies, that he may not repent: But why should these two different conditions of the offender be pointed out to us, if our behaviour must be exactly the same, whether he repents, or whether he does not?

It seems then, that, as it is the express duty of charity, on the one hand, to forgive an offending brother, if he repents—and, on the other, not to take revenge upon him, if he does not repent; so, there is an intermediate behaviour allowable, for distinguishing the repentant from the unrepentant offender; which carries in it no breach of the duty of Christian forgiveness.—In my next discourse, we will enquire what that is.

SERMON

S E R M O N X C I I I .

The same Subject continued,

LUKE xvii. 3, 4.

*If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him;
and if he repent, forgive him.*

*And if he trespass against thee seven times in
a day, and seven times in a day turn again
to thee, saying, I repent—thou shalt forgive
him.*

IT is to be observed, in pursuance of the enquiry indicated at the close of my last discourse,

1. That though *revenge* be forbidden towards unrepenting offenders, yet *punishment* is not; for, though every instance of revenge has the nature of punishment, yet every instance of punishment has not the nature of revenge; which takes its nature from the circumstance of gratifying a spirit of resentment: a circumstance which is so far from belonging to punishment,

punishment, that it should never enter into it. And though punishment, in common speech, is often called revenge, yet, in common sense, it must be distinguished from it. The magistrate is called "a revenger, to execute wrath upon him that doth evil;" yet every one sees, that the vengeance he executes proceeds from other and better reasons than that of gratifying any resentment he feels against the offender. The Apostle says of himself, that "he has in readiness to revenge all disobedience." Can we suppose he said so from a desire of indulging his own animosity, and not rather from a desire of promoting the good of the church, and, if possible, of the offenders themselves? It is, surely, owing to the promiscuous use of the terms, *punishment* and *revenge*, and to a want of observing the distinction which really lies between them, that good men, whilst they are really directed by the rules both of justice and charity too, are often censured as pursuing the dictates of revenge, because they inflict the like evil which we see arising from revenge: but a little attention will serve to shew us, that like effects may arise from quite different causes; and that the evil, which sometimes is the effect of revenge, at other times is the effect of right judgment, founded on necessity and advantage;

advantage; which, therefore, however it may in common speech bear the same name, yet, in common sense, is of a quite different nature.

This punishment, as it is distinguished from revenge, is one thing which is yielded up in the forgiveness of a brother (for it would be absurd to say we yield up revenge—a thing we have no title to, which it would be a crime to exact); and, as this punishment is yielded up in the forgiveness of a brother, merely upon his repentance, it is plain, that the unrepentant still remains liable to it.—It may be observed,

2. That though we are forbidden to deny the acts of common humanity to the impenitent offender, yet we are not obliged to put him exactly on the same footing as to acts of favour, with him who behaves otherwise. It is true, the command of forgiving and loving our enemies, and of doing good to those who hate us, is very express; yet it must not be so understood as to oppose the dictates of common sense, the general interest of religion and morality, the general meaning of Scripture, and the particular example even of God himself; whom we are commanded to imitate, and who, though he is kind to the ungrateful,

ful,

ful and the wicked, yet makes the dutiful and the good the objects of his special favour even in this world, and will more eminently distinguish them as such in the next. The duty of loving and being kind to those who hate and despitefully use us, may be well and sufficiently performed, without throwing down all distinction between the grateful and the ungrateful, friends and enemies, by a promiscuous dispensation of our favours among all alike; which is a conduct common sense will not admit of, as at all consistent with the necessary government, or indeed with the ordinary conversation, subsisting among mankind; and which would much hurt the general interest of religion and morality; as it would throw down the sanction of temporal good and evil, which is necessary to maintain them in the present state of things.

The withdrawing these acts of special favour, as it is distinguished from withdrawing acts of common humanity, is another thing which is yielded up in the forgiveness of a brother; and, as this is to be done merely on account of his repentance, it follows, that where there is not repentance, there is no title to such acts of favour.—We may observe,

3. That,

3. That, as every man has a natural right of defending himself against injuries before they fall, so he has a natural right to seek reparation of them after they are fallen, as well as to provide for his security against a repetition of them; and the person, from whom the injury proceeds, as he is the object from whom we may justly demand reparation, so is he the object from whom we may as justly demand future security: and this right of seeking reparation, and providing security, the gospel of Christ no more takes away, than it does the right of self-defence. The exerting this right is often called revenge, as we have seen punishment is often so called, and just as improperly; for both of them may, and always should, be conducted without any spirit of malice or resentment; and where they are so conducted, they are not revenge, but justice.

The yielding up this demand of reparation, and future security, is oftentimes a part of the forgiveness we shew to a repentant brother; but, as it is yielded up purely because he repents, it follows, that it holds in full force against him who does not repent.

From the foregoing observations, laid together, it appears, what that behaviour is which

is allowable for distinguishing a repentant from an unrepentant offender. It appears, that as, on the one hand, the repentant offender has a right to be wholly forgiven, so the unrepentant offender, on the other hand, though he is not to be pursued with acts of revenge, yet remains still liable to punishment; liable to be refused acts of favour, though entitled to acts of humanity; and liable to make reparation and give security. The offending party, I say, if unrepentant, is justly liable to all this; if so, the party offended is justly at liberty to put all this in force against him: from whence, I think, the conclusion is a true one—that if, notwithstanding the want of repentance in the offender, we still yield up all this, it is an eminent performance of the duty of forgiveness; but if we do not, it is no breach of that duty.—Yet some may think it is.

I took notice, in the preceding discourse, of their opinion, who would insinuate, that forgiving offenders merely upon their repentance, is not acting up to the duty we owe society. These stand on one extreme of the matter before us; there are those who get to the opposite extreme, and think, that proceeding with any public severity against
an

an offending brother (however unrepentant) is not acting up to the duty of true Christian forgiveness. Those of the former opinion stand upon the necessity of civil government, and from thence would throw down the whole duty of forgiveness; those of the latter opinion stand upon the duty of forgiveness, and from thence would throw down all civil government. Both draw wrong conclusions from right principles: the former are right in their principle, that civil government must be maintained; but conclude wrong, in setting aside the duty of forgiveness, upon a wrong presumption—that such duty is destructive of civil government. The latter, too, are right in their principle, that Christians ought to forgive each other; but conclude wrong, in setting aside the use of punishment upon a wrong presumption—that the impenitent, as well as penitent, offenders are to be equally dealt with and forgiven. Doubtless, it is owing to some men's maintaining this extreme, that others have been drove into the contrary, and have set aside all forgiveness, because the forgiveness which some plead for is impracticable, and inconsistent with society;—as certainly it is; for society, without civil government,

vernment, there cannot be ; nor can civil government subsist, if the magistrate has no authority to punish offenders ; and he might as well not have such authority, if the law of Christ forbids the subject in any case to have recourse to it.

So far is the gospel of Christ from destroying the authority of the civil magistrate, that it confirms it. “ He is the minister of God “ to thee for good,” says St. Paul ; “ but if “ thou do that which is evil, be afraid, for “ he beareth not the sword in vain.” And, though the gospel expressly lays down the duty of forgiving a repentant offender ; yet it as clearly gives such directions for our conduct towards the unrepentant, as sets him within reach of public authority. Our Saviour’s own direction is this : “ If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him ; and “ if he repent, forgive him.” Luke xvii. 3.—“ But, if he will not hear thee, then take “ with thee one or two more, that in the “ mouth of two or three witnesses every “ word may be established ; and if he shall “ neglect to hear them, tell it unto the “ church.” Matt. xviii. 15.—This direction of our Saviour’s plainly shews, that a
different

different conduct is due to an unrepenting offender than what we shew to him who repents; but if we are only to forgive both, where would be that difference of conduct? It shews too, that we are to have recourse to some public authority, to supply what our own private authority, either of advice or reproof, cannot effect. Now it matters not where you will set this public authority, whether in the church or in the state; for the point is not, whether the church *or* the state, but whether *either* of them, may be applied to against an unrepenting offender.

Such, therefore, as carry the duty of forgiveness so far as to preclude the use of civil government in bringing unrepentant offenders to punishment, in procuring reparation for past injuries, or in providing for our future security, carry the duty beyond where Christ hath set it; who, when he prescribed this duty, did not mean thereby to disqualify us for living in society, but to make us better members of it. Now, where would there be a safe place in society for Christians, if, whilst they lie exposed to injuries on all sides, they should be disarmed of the common instruments of protection and security, which every one else is

allowed to use? or, to speak more properly, How could Christians, at all, form themselves into society, if they are not allowed to make use of that bond, which must tie every society together — the use of temporal discouragements against breaking the necessary laws of it?

It is but too true, that Christians often use these means improperly; and few are so far masters of their passions as to be able to punish an offender, to prosecute the reparation of an injury, or to secure themselves against farther mischief, without feeling a secret joy (which they ought not) at the sufferings of the offender. This is wrong; but the fault is not in the means before us, but in our way of applying it. That justice may be pursued without breach of charity, is no paradox: we see it in the conduct of God; whose justice, though attended with severity, is always consistent with his goodness and love for mankind. It is therefore practicable in the conduct of man; who, when he uses the assistance of civil government in pursuit of justice, is not only allowed, but is strictly obliged, to take charity along with him. If he does this, he breaks no law of Christ;
if

if he does not, he not only breaks the law of Christ, but abuses the laws of society;—which are appointed for enabling us to pursue justice, not revenge; and are no more meant to give us a liberty of hurting others, than Christ's law of forgiveness is meant to deny us the liberty of defending ourselves.

70438

S E R M O N X C I V .

BENEVOLENCE ENFORCED, AND CHARITY-
SCHOOLS VINDICATED : A CHARITY-
SERMON.

I JOHN iv. II.

*Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to
love one another.*

THE Apostle is laying down an exhortation to mutual love among Christians: and the argument on which he supports this exhortation, is built upon the example of God, whom he asserts to be full of love to mankind. This assertion he supports by its proper proof: "In this," says he, "was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him." And this great instance of God's love towards mankind, is still heightened by the consideration,

ration, that it was prior to any instance which we could shew of our love towards him ; nay, so far was it from being any return for our love to him, that he shewed it to us, who were sinners against him, and directed it for saving us from the mischief of being so. " Herein," says the Apostle, " is love, not " that we loved God, but that he loved us, " and sent his Son to be the propitiation for " our sins."

The Apostle, having thus set forth the example of God, and proved his assertion, that he is full of love to mankind, draws this conclusion—" Beloved, if God so loved us, " we ought also to love one another."

This conclusion is undeniable; for, if " God " so loved us," it is plain, that all the return, which is in our power to make, is due to God. Now all the return which we can shew to God for the great love which he hath expressed towards us, is to love him, and to do as he hath commanded us ; both which terminate in loving one another : for, the loving God, and the loving one another, are, by the declaration of God himself, inseparable, and naturally imply each other ; and, indeed, the common sense of men shews, that our love of a friend, who hath served us, is
suitably

suitably expressed by our loving those whom he loves. Then, as to the doing what God hath commanded us, if that be (as most undoubtedly it is) a return, which we owe to God, for the love he hath shewed towards us, this will necessarily lead us to the duty of loving one another, because that is a duty which he hath expressly commanded. So that all the return which we can make to God for his loving us, terminates in loving one another; since, whether we are desirous of loving God, or whether we are desirous of doing as God hath commanded, it is plain, we shall do neither sincerely, if we neglect the duty of loving one another.

The obligation then to this duty, being too clear to want any farther illustration, let us see what it principally contains.

And here we shall easily discover, that since we are in general obliged to love one another, *because* God hath loved us, so we are particularly obliged to love one another, *as* God hath loved us; that is, to shew the same kind of love towards each other, as God hath shewed towards us all. Now, God so loved us, that he sent his Son to recover us from the guilt and misery of sin, and “to guide
“our

“our feet into the way of righteousness.” So far, therefore, as we have it in our power to shew this kind of love to each other, it is our duty to do it; and, when we have taken a survey of the various methods, in which we are capable of expressing our love to our fellow-Christians, this will be found to be the highest, the most pleasing to God, and the most beneficial to those who are the objects of it; since no kind of love can be higher than that which God himself is pleased to shew; nothing can be more acceptable to him than to see his creatures following his example; nor can any kind of love be more beneficial to our fellow-creatures, than that which provides for the salvation of their souls, and their future eternal happiness.

It is true, we cannot imitate, but at an infinite distance, the great work of God in the salvation of man through Christ; nor can we at all imitate some of the amazing steps which Christ took to accomplish it; but we shall do enough for entitling ourselves to the approbation of God, and for shewing the highest instance of love to our fellow-Christians, if we place the same object in our view which Christ had in his; and make our way
up

up to it, though not through all his steps, yet through so many of them as lie in our way.

The object which Christ had in his view, was to save men from sin, and to lead them, by a faith and knowledge in him, to the favour of God: what he did and taught for this purpose, is faithfully transmitted down to us in the sacred records of the gospel; and, though he has long since ascended to the right hand of God, yet, through the ministry of that church which he hath set up among us, the means of coming at a faith and knowledge in him is still preserved, and will be preserved to the end of the world.

With this means before us, we have it in our power to set the same object in our view which Christ had, and to pursue it, by being instrumental in recovering and saving men from sin, and leading them to a faith and knowledge in Christ. It is true, Christ's work, in saving men from sin, had one principal part in it, which we cannot presume to imitate; I mean, his saving them from the guilt and punishment of sin after they had incurred it: this he did by the merits of the sacrifice he made of himself; which, as it will never be repeated by himself, so can never be imitated

tated by any other. But, in saving men from sin, so far as to help them against the power of it, and by setting the faith and knowledge of Christ before them, to prevent them from falling into it, and to instruct them in the ways of righteousness — in this part of his work, Christ hath left us to imitate him. We are all enabled, according to our several stations, to do something in this work; and it will be our greatest title to the love of God, as it is the greatest instance of our love towards mankind, to be diligent in promoting it.

It is the happiness of this country (God grant it may never prove our condemnation!) that we are enlightened with the purest light of Christ's gospel: nothing is wanting among us, that is necessary for promoting a faith and knowledge of Christ: the Scriptures are in every house, and the opportunities of being instructed how to understand them, as well as of being exhorted how to live by them, are so frequent, that if our practice does not answer our profession, it cannot, in general, be charged to ignorance, at least to such ignorance as will excuse us.

Now, in proportion as the gospel abounds among us, we are qualified both for taking
care

care of our own salvation, and for being instrumental in promoting the salvation of others : and, being thus qualified, our condemnation will be the greater, if we be found deficient in either of these great duties ; which are so united that they cannot be separated. We are all, more or less, endued with a power of influencing the religious conduct of those with whom we are concerned ; and, as we feel ourselves endued with such power, we should feel the obligation we are under of applying it. This duty which we owe to others, is so connected with the like duty owing to ourselves, that they mutually promote and assist each other : the care we feel for our own religious conduct will naturally prompt us with the like care for their conduct who belong to us ; and the religious care we at any time shew for the behaviour of others, will as naturally reflect back advantage upon our own ; for, if our love for others prompts us to take the like care of their souls which we take of our own, the love of ourselves will surely prevent us from taking less care of our own souls than we do of the souls of others. But, besides this, as such care makes others better men, so it makes them more useful ; and, whilst they are put in a way of pursuing what is truly

their own good, they become better qualified and disposed for operating towards the good of those about them. This every one must be sensible of, who has ever so little to do with mankind: for it is an assured truth (however some may affect to disregard it) that, as there is no dealing with mankind but upon the common principles of morality, so there is no surer support of those principles than the religion of Christ. Some, I say, may affect to talk otherwise, as if honesty needed no support from religion—but it is only to screen themselves, and to prevent your having the worse opinion of them for having no religion; but, take such men where they are not concerned to defend their own conduct, but are obliged to depend upon the conduct of others, and, as you will find them anxious for having honest men to deal with, so you will find them better satisfied with that honesty which is supported on principles of religion, than with that which is not so supported. In short, such men of morals, however they may set themselves up in speculation against the use of religion in keeping men honest, yet by their conduct discover, that they do not so much think it useless as troublesome; and that they care not how much others have
of

of religion, provided that they may be allowed to have none.

The desire then of making others religious and good, as it is the highest instance of love we can shew towards them, so its consequences are of the highest advantage to ourselves: and this desire will set us at work, with every means we have, of promoting the faith and knowledge of Christ among those with whom we are concerned; as this is the most effectual step we can take for making them not only good but useful, and, whilst it prepares them to be fit members of the kingdom of heaven, qualifies them in the mean time to be beneficial members of society.

It was upon this principle, that our ancestors, in former times, set up public nurseries for the religious education of the poor. After the reformation had once introduced a free use of the Scriptures in this kingdom, there were those who thought the best return of gratitude they could shew to God for such a blessing, was to deliver down to posterity the inestimable treasure they had themselves received. They were sensible, that they advanced their own salvation, whilst they promoted such means as might tend to the salva-

tion of others : they were sensible, that they very signally served the state, by establishing provisions for the sound religion of its members.

It is true, such public provisions for the education of the poor were eminently necessary then, when there was little or no learning, even of the lowest kind, among us, and the purity of religion was but just risen from the darkness of popery ; but it would be a very wrong inference to conclude, because the case is altered, that therefore such provisions are useless now. For, with respect to the learning which is necessary for the lower ranks of people, though there is abundantly more of it among them now than there was formerly, yet, surely, no one will say, that this makes instruction in such learning useless. There are more among the lower sort of people now, who can read and write, than there were formerly ; and this, doubtless, is owing, in a great measure, if not principally, to these provisions of education we are speaking of ; but to whatever cause it is owing, still such qualifications can be attained no otherwise than by instruction ; there is, therefore, the same necessity that the children of the poor should be taught these qualifications

qualifications now, as ever there was; namely, that if they are not taught them, they will never be able to arrive at them.

And some perhaps may think, if that should be the case, there would be no harm done. We may be told, perhaps, that the children of the poor are over-taught in our charity-schools; that, according to the present circumstances of the state, their manual labour would be more useful than abilities of a higher kind, which only serve to make them despise such offices as they ought to fill, and to aim at those they are not designed for.

There is something in this observation; but not a great deal. There is enough in it to point at an improvement which might be made in the use of charity-schools; but not enough to set aside the institution of them as useless, or even to set aside, as improper, that sort of learning which is taught there. As the setting up these provisions of instruction for the poor was the first step towards their recovery from ignorance; so, try the experiment when we will, the setting them aside will be the first step towards their relapse into it again; and, were it not for these provisions, in a few generations, the lower class

of people would be as ignorant as ever ; and why they should be more useful to the public, in being so, is hard to conceive. It is no obstruction, surely, to a labouring man's work, that he is able to read and write ; nor does it hurt the public, if, after the labour of the week, he is qualified for the devotion of the Sunday, and to read in his Bible.—It is inhuman to consider a poor labouring man in no better light than we consider the cattle with which he works, and as having nothing to do but what by the mere strength of his body he can perform : as different creatures, surely they should be treated differently. When our horses have done their work, we give them their provender ; their nature neither requires nor admits of any farther care. When a labouring man has done his work, we pay him his wages ; but is this all the concern which either we are obliged to have for him, or which he ought to have for himself ? These poor men, surely, have souls as well as bodies to take care of ; and there is as natural a demand of proper food for the one as there is for the other ; and if, after their manual labour for the public, they are qualified, by the help of their education, to employ and improve their minds,

minds, I see not how the state is hurt by it— though every one can see how many ways it may receive advantage by it.

There may be particular instances of some who are farther taught in these sort of schools than is necessary, and of others who behave themselves improperly with the qualifications they have got. All human institutions are liable to abuse and defect; and, however wisely designed, will, in some degree, and in some way or other, produce mischief as well as good; and, if such instances are detrimental to the public, it were pity but some method was thought of to prevent them: but it would be no wise method, for preventing particular mischiefs, to throw up a general good; and, because some make a wrong use of the learning they get at charity-schools, to determine therefore there shall be none, or no such learning in them.

With respect to the learning, then, which is to be had in these public provisions of instruction, the present encouragement of them is as proper as the first institution of them; because, however learning is encreased among us, yet, people must be taught it now as well as formerly; and if the poor are not taught their share of learning in these places, they

must go without it ; which, if any one proposes they should do, surely it is a proposal, which, as it manifestly tends to make slaves and beasts of the poor, so one would think it can meet with approbation only with those who have a disposition to be tyrants and riders.

With respect to the religious instruction with which the children of the poor are supplied from these institutions, no one surely will say they are useless, or that they are not as useful and necessary now as when they were first instituted. They were first set up, it is true, in the dawn of pure religion among us, and we now live in the meridian lustre of it ; and what then ? Is there not as much care to be applied for keeping religion among us as there was for introducing it ? Perhaps there is more. Vice, as well as ignorance, is an obstacle in the way to religion ; and whoever considers the natural temper of mankind, must be sensible, that it is easier to break through ignorance to come at a knowledge of religion, than it is to surmount the influence of vice in order to preserve it : for there is a pleasure in breaking through ignorance, which spurs us forward in the work ; but there is a pain in surmounting the influence of vice, which
holds

holds us from setting about it with vigour, and which, upon a competition between vice and religion, inclines us to be more ready to part with the latter; and whoever compares the temper of the present times with that of former times, may doubt, at least, whether, as our ancestors overcame ignorance, to get at true religion, so we are not in danger of being overcome by our licentiousness in the preservation of it; and, whether we may not be as much inclined to set it aside as our ancestors were eager to lay hold of it.—To guard against this danger, it is not sufficient that the gospel of Christ abounds among us, and that no country enjoys more light of instruction in the knowledge and use of it than we do; still we are not, for that reason, to leave every one, without direction, to his own disposition, whether he will accept this abundant blessing or not;—on the contrary, the greater opportunities there are of Christian instruction among us, the more anxious should we be in bringing every one within the influence of it, and in leading men to that which (but for such care) they would be too apt to neglect; for, abundant as this blessing is, men must be brought and invited to it; and the greater the provision is, the greater

encouragement we have ; and consequently the greater obligation upon us for bringing and inviting them.

Children, especially, must not be left to themselves ; but must be early and carefully brought under the influence of that Christian knowledge with which God hath so fully blessed this country. The children of the poorer sort, still more especially, who, if they were left to provide their own spiritual knowledge, would soon starve in the midst of that plenty of it which we have about us ; which would be a plenty of what they could have no taste for : and it would be of no use to them, when they are grown up, that churches are so many, and the doors of them so often opened, when they could feel no inclination for going into them,

Those who are for discrediting the present use and necessity of charity-schools, may, perhaps, take up exceptions upon this part of their design as well as the former ; and they may ask us, Where is the good effect which might be expected from such provisions for the religious instruction of the poor ? Do the poor among us, in general, behave in life answerably to the religious education they have received in these places ? Truly, I think they
do

do not: but then, I doubt, the same question may be carried higher up, and we may ask, whether the rich behave answerably to their religious education? So that, if the religious education of the poor must be thrown aside for its want of due effect, all religious education whatever must be thrown aside for the same reason. The question may be asked of Christianity itself, Whether men behave answerably to their profession of it? but no sober man will think, that the wicked lives of Christians is a reason for setting aside Christianity as useless. That numbers of the poor are profligate and bad, notwithstanding our charity-schools, is true; and so they are, notwithstanding our churches, and many other helps to a better life, that are daily within their reach; which, however, I hope, are not to be set aside for that reason: but, though numbers of the poor are not the better men for these provisions of religious education, I hope there are numbers of them who are the better for them; and, let the disproportion between these numbers be ever so great, still, if such provisions are the means of saving but a few from destruction, they deserve protection and encouragement. Bad as the behaviour of the poor may be, with these charity-schools

schools among us, it is reasonable to suppose it would be still worse, at least no one can say it would be better, without them.

Notwithstanding, therefore, such observations as these upon charity-schools (which some would have carry the force of objections against them) they are certainly as useful and necessary now as they were at first. It was upon the principle of Christian love, and for promoting the important as well as pious work of making good Christians and useful members of society, that our ancestors, in former times, first set up public nurseries of religious education for the poor. The same work is surely as pious and as important as ever it was; and it is upon the same principle that their posterity follow their example; and that we see so much care applied (in this metropolis especially) for promoting a knowledge of religion among the poor; and for training them up to be useful members of society.

And, surely, it is a commendable and truly Christian sight, when we see men of better stations in life, stepping from their business to direct the management of charity-schools, and solicitous for their support: and a no less commendable and Christian sight it is, when

we

we see others ready to assist and encourage their "labour of love," by a generous contribution, according to the measure of their abilities. Such labour, so supported, will be as successful as it is good; and will not be more welcome to those who are refreshed and instructed by it, than it will be acceptable to God, who sees and who approves what we are doing. Not that he wants such assistance from our hands: He who provideth for the sparrow, and feedeth the young ravens that call upon him, wants no assistance or supply for feeding the children of men; but he chuses this method of feeding them through our hands, preferably to all other methods equally in his power; and he chuses it, not merely for their sakes who are fed, but for ours who feed them, that by such employment we may be reminded of his unspeakable love towards us, and be supplied with an opportunity of expressing our unfeigned love towards him, by shewing a suitable love of our brethren; and that, by co-operating with him in his own great work of loving and saving mankind, we may the more effectually "work out our own salvation," and procure to ourselves a more glorious reward in his kingdom.

These sort of charities are the most ancient, the most frequent, and, I will add, the best intended, of any that we have among us; and every serious Christian, who rightly considers on what reasons and principles they are founded, and at what end they aim, will wish they may still flourish and continue; and, instead of being offended, will rejoice at the frequency of them. They are charities that are directed, not for relieving the bad consequences of vice, or removing any of its inconveniences: such methods alone (if we provide no farther) may prove rather an encouragement to vice, by removing the only restraint which most men feel from running into it; and, whilst they relieve present misery, may multiply the future objects of it.

But these sort of charities, without waiting for the consequences of vice, strike at preventing the very first causes of it. They are directed to the soul, and aim not at the work of relieving wicked men, but at the much more noble work of making good men. They are charities, which are founded on the great principle of our redemption through Christ, and are directed for saving men from sin, and instructing them in righteousness.

“ If

“ If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.” It was my text; and I chose it, as it contains under it both the *design* and the *reason* of such charities as we have now before us. The design of them is no less than this—to use our endeavours for saving those about us;—and the reason of such design is no less than this—because Christ hath saved us. Charities built on such a reason, and directed to such a design, must always be worthy our notice and encouragement, so long as it is worth our study to be Christians. They are strong lessons, and a great security of religion among us; and, when we resort to such calls as these for their support, with a right heart, and seriously consider before whose sight we are, *why* we give, and *to what* we give, the benefit we are conferring may well be balanced by that we are receiving; the reflections we feel on such occasions, may tend as much to our own salvation, as our charity tends to the salvation of others, and we may feel the truth of our Saviour’s observation, “ It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

Let us then seriously consider in whose presence we are, and what we are called to do. We are in the presence of God; and are called

ed

ed to recollect Christ's love in saving us, and from thence to take incitement for our endeavours in saving our brethren. Let us do it with a sincerity becoming Christians, and with a liberality becoming our abilities, remembering this, that God, who sees what we are doing, looks not only at the *hand*, but at the *heart*, that gives;—that he sees not only what we *do*, but what we *can* and what we *ought* to do;—that he is not to be mocked; for, “whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” Let us consider this; and, as we are thankful for his past love, as we are desirous of his future love, so let us shew our own love to those whom he hath now set before us, and whom he commands us to love, even as he hath loved us.

It is justly observable of the gospel, that it greatly improves the duties of morality: not that it enlarges their number; for the gospel sets forth no precept but what is naturally reasonable, and consequently a moral duty: but it enforces the observance of them by much higher motives, as well as by the most excellent reward.

The duty of mutual benevolence receives great improvement from the gospel. It is a duty founded on the principle of humanity,
and

and we feel a motive for the observance of it, as we are men : but it is much improved by the additional principle of religion ; and we feel a higher motive for the observance of it, as we are Christians. As fellow-creatures, we ought to love one another ; but as fellow-Christians, we ought to love one another as brethren.

Our redemption in Christ makes us all brethren. In that gracious work, the true Son of God condescended to leave the bosom of his father, and become our brother in human flesh ; he was born and lived among us for our instruction, and died for our salvation : then, returning to the Father, he sent down his Holy Spirit into our hearts, to conduct us in the salvation which he had so dearly purchased for us ; by the communication of which heavenly blessing we are advanced to the dignity of adopted sons of God, and so are become brethren of Christ in the Divine Spirit, as he became our brother in human flesh : and thus being brethren with Christ, the Son of God, both in flesh and spirit, we are the sons of God, and brethren one with another.

What an affinity is this ! and how procured !
for mortal man to be thus intimately related
to

to God ! and that the Son of God should thus wash us from the stains of sin by his blood, to qualify us for this relation—should stoop down to clothe himself in human nature, that we might be advanced towards the Divine nature, and be made brethren and partakers with him in the glory of our heavenly Father !

There is, surely, nothing in the works of nature, which is comparable to this work and wonder of grace : nor is there any relation, which we derive from our human condition, comparable to this which we derive from our redemption in Christ ; and the consideration of it supplies us with higher motives for mutual benevolence, than those which may be drawn from the principles of mere morality.

SERMON

S E R M O N XCV.

ON CHRIST'S RESURRECTION.

ACTS X. 40, 41.

Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God.

AS the important event of our Lord's resurrection was to be an object of faith to future ages, it was necessary that some should be appointed for giving testimony of it to the world; and that those who were appointed for that purpose should themselves have the fullest conviction of the truth of it.

Our Saviour's own disciples, whom he had chosen to attend him during the whole course of his ministry, that they might be witnesses of the several transactions belonging to his

VOL. III.

P

life

life and death, were the properest men to be appointed witnesses of his resurrection: and accordingly, great care was taken that these men should have the fullest conviction of the truth of it; so much, that God was pleased even to suffer an incredulity in their tempers, otherwise blameable, that the removal of it might strengthen their conviction, and heighten the testimony arising from it.

Thus much was necessary; and thus much Divine Providence has thought sufficient for establishing the credit of Christ's resurrection, by *shewing him openly to his chosen disciples*, without shewing him as openly to *all the people*.—"Yet, as the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the most important article of the Christian faith, should the evidence on which it stands be confined to a few persons only? Ought not the proof of this fact to have been of the most general nature? At least, should it not have been laid before more and other witnesses than Christ's own disciples?"

The two points on which this enquiry stands, are these:—1st, That the witnesses of our Lord's resurrection were but *a few*. 2^{dly}, That those few were his *own disciples*.

1. As

1. As to the first of these points.—It is not the number of witnesses on which the credit of any testimony essentially depends; but their sufficient knowledge and integrity. If there be enough to speak to the several parts and necessary circumstances of a fact, and if the knowledge and integrity of each be unexceptionable, the testimony is compleat, and the judgment is satisfied; and, when the judgment is once satisfied, it is absurd to say it *requires* more, though it may *admit* of more.—The fact before us is the resurrection of Christ from the dead: the evidences of this fact are his disciples, to whom only he appeared after his resurrection. Now, though the disciples of Christ were few when compared in number with the whole people of the Jews, yet were they many, when considered as witnesses of a matter of fact. It was not to a single disciple or two, that he shewed himself after his resurrection, he was “seen by above five hundred brethren at once.” Supposing, therefore, these men’s knowledge of the fact, and their integrity in relating it, to be unexceptionable, they were certainly enough to afford a compleat testimony of Christ’s resurrection.—The smallness of their number, therefore, cannot be a reasonable objection

against the validity of their testimony, if other circumstances do not concur to weaken it.

2. Can it be said, then, that their being Christ's own disciples, weakens their testimony? Does this give us any room to suspect their integrity? or, because they were the only persons who saw him after he was risen, can we suppose they might pretend he was risen when he really was not?

There is not the least room for such a suspicion.—For, 1. The disciples could not expect any advantage by such a pretence; and did really suffer the greatest disadvantages by maintaining it. 2. They could not set about forging such a pretence, because they really were not in expectation of their master's resurrection, and were with great difficulty brought to believe it. These circumstances are certainly inconsistent with supposing that the disciples account of the resurrection is a forgery of theirs. For, why should they forge what would be so detrimental to them? or, how could they forge what they had no notion of?

The testimony, then, which the disciples alone gave of our Lord's resurrection, is a sufficient testimony, notwithstanding the circumstances,

cumstances, that they were but few persons, and that they were our Lord's disciples;—since, few as they were, they were reasonably enough for the purpose; and, though they were our Lord's disciples, yet there is no reason to suspect their integrity.

If then the testimony of our Lord's disciples be sufficient to recommend the truth of his resurrection to the world, there will arise an easy answer to this question, Why were not more of the people taken in and made part of the evidence?—Because there was no necessity for it. Examine the evidence as it stands: Is it satisfactory, or is it not?—If it is satisfactory, we cannot complain for want of more. If it is not satisfactory, say where it fails; and shew that it wants the necessary supports on which a competent evidence must stand: shew that the integrity of the witnesses is to be suspected; but for this, you must bring some farther argument besides their being Christ's disciples; which circumstance alone will not lead us to suspect them of a forgery, unless it appears that they had the natural and sufficient inducements to forgery on their side; which is so far from being the case, that they must have been very weak

indeed, to have set up a forgery so much to their mischief, and so easy to be detected.

“But, though the concurrence of the Jewish people, in the evidence of our Lord's resurrection, was not absolutely necessary to make it a compleat evidence, would it not have been serviceable in making it a more successful one? Would it not have had a better effect, in strengthening the general credit of the fact, if, for instance, Christ had convinced the chief priests and elders, as well as his disciples, and had set the great proof of his character before those who were not inclined to admit him, as well as before those who already believed in him?”

Whoever reflects upon the conduct of the chief priests and elders, will hardly think, that it would have strengthened the general credit of the resurrection, to have given them the same sensible evidence of it, which was given to the disciples.

All the effect which such a sensible evidence could produce, would have been to convince them, that Jesus was risen.—But did they really want that conviction? On the contrary, does not their behaviour shew that they had rather a dislike to our Saviour's resurrection

tion

tion than a disbelief in it; and that they were really persuaded of the truth of his being risen, but were desirous of suppressing it? If this be true, it would have been of no service, in propagating the credit of the resurrection, to have given the chief priests and elders that sensible evidence of it which the disciples had—since they did not want it for their own conviction, and would not have made a right use of it for the conviction of others.

That this is not an imaginary charge against them, appears from their real behaviour; which shews, that they believed Jesus to be risen, but that they were industrious to suppress the credit of it.

The pretence which they gave out to amuse the people, is a proof of this.

When the soldiers who guarded the sepulchre told the chief priests what had happened there, the chief priests gave them money, and this instruction, “ Say ye, his disciples “ came by night and stole him away whilst “ we slept.”

Now, what may we naturally conclude to have been the real opinion of the chief priests, when they heard the soldiers account of what passed at the sepulchre?—Is there not great reason to conclude, that the soldiers themselves

believed Jesus to be risen? And is there not as much reason to conclude, that the chief priests believed the soldiers?—They might have suspected the account, had it come from the disciples; but they had the greatest reason to believe it, as it came from the soldiers. When they gave the soldiers their lesson, they must know themselves that it was a mere pretence; and the soldiers must have been asleep indeed, if they did not know it to be so too.—Since, therefore, they did not believe that the disciples had stolen away the body (for this was purely their own pretence) and could not assign any other method by which it might be conveyed away, they must believe that it was really risen.

This was the opinion of the chief priests and elders; and what may we reasonably think was the opinion of the people?—The anxiety with which the chief priests endeavoured to amuse the people, discovers which way they thought their natural sense and judgment would be apt to lead them; and, is it not more likely that the people accepted this pretence, because they were glad to have something to say, rather than because they really believed it? The disciples came by night and stole away the body whilst the soldiers slept! — A likely story!

story!—The people had common sense, surely, and must see, that if the disciples had made such an attempt, the soldiers (if they were awake) would have prevented them: and, if they were asleep, how did they *know* that the disciples came and stole away the body? or, if they *suspected* them to have done it, why was there not immediate search made for the recovery of it? This had been well worth their pains; and, had the body been really stole, would doubtless have been successful.—There can, therefore, be no answer given to this obvious question—Why did they not search for the body, after it was stolen? but this, That they knew very well it was not stolen.—We cannot think that this pretence, which appears so absurd to us, could appear satisfactory to the people of the Jews. In fact, it did not; for, in spite of this pretence, nay, notwithstanding their prejudice against Christ and his disciples, great numbers of the Jews immediately embraced Christianity, and afterwards died martyrs to the faith of Christ's resurrection.

Upon the whole, then, it is no objection against the validity of the disciples testimony of the resurrection, that they [were the only persons who saw Christ after he was risen,

and

and that the chief priests and people of the Jews did not : Because,

1. With respect to us, the testimony of the disciples, as it stands, is reasonably sufficient to convince us of the truth of it.

2. With respect to the chief priests and people of the Jews, there was no necessity of convincing them that Christ was risen, by his visible appearance among them ; because they were actually convinced of it without this proof.

3. Christ's visible appearance among the Jews, after his resurrection, would not have been of service to the general credit of it ; because they would have been more inclined to suppress the conviction it yielded, than to declare it. They suppressed the conviction they already had ; and, as they denied Christ's resurrection, not because they disbelieved, but because they disliked it, it is not unreasonable to say, that greater evidence would not have extorted their confession, since evidence was not the thing they wanted, but the thing they were afraid of.

One thing more occurs to be taken notice of, which may furnish us with matter of practical use.

The

The objection we have been considering, supposes, that the Jews had a right to expect the same evidence of our Lord's resurrection which his disciples had.

All that the Jews had a right to expect, was a reasonable, competent evidence of it; and this they had from the testimony of the disciples. The evidence given to the disciples themselves, was the greatest that could be given; and, surely, we cannot think but the Jews were justly denied that, when we consider how they had hitherto opposed Christ's pretensions with the greatest obstinacy, under the fullest proofs which could be given in support of them. Their obstinacy in denying him to be the Christ, when their own Scriptures, if properly examined, would have led them to expect that he *might* be so, and his miracles had actually proved that he *was* so;—their contemptuous, and at last barbarous, treatment of a person, whose doctrine and behaviour, only as a teacher, claimed their respect;—these were, doubtless, crimes in the conduct of the Jews; and, when added to their ingratitude, in being the first to persecute him who had made them the first proposal of salvation, must render them just objects of God's displeasure, at least, not fit objects
of

of his favour. By this conduct, they had hardened themselves against the methods which Christ had hitherto taken for their conviction, and were, for that reason, unworthy of being favoured with any more.

This is no unusual method in the conduct of Providence. A proper application of what he gives, is a reason with him for dispensing more; as the neglect or misuse of it, is a reason for withholding what is not merited, or will be misapplied.

When God calls us to a faith in his purposes and conduct, he supplies us with sufficient reasons on which we may build our faith; but this supply is no more a certain means of making us believers, than the natural blessings of his hand are a certain means of making us rich or happy; but, like them, are distributed as a suitable means, which, by our own proper application, may make us so. And, when men have neglected the sufficient means of faith allowed them, it is no more inconsistent with God's justice to let them continue in their infidelity, by denying them stronger means of conviction, than it is inconsistent with his goodness to let a man pine in beggary, after wasting an estate, by refusing him the means to recover it.

The

The government of God over his creatures is, in every part of it, exactly suited to the nature of the subject about which it is employed. The material part of the creation requires the immediate direction of his hand; and, where he has not planted reason, his own wisdom acts alone: but where he has appointed reason and free agency (as in man, who is a sort of minister in his government, as well as the subject of it) there he inspects and rules not with compulsive power; — but he governs man like what he is; and, after furnishing him with sufficient means for the discovery of truth, and for making himself wise, leaves him to his own freedom to apply them. In consequence of this character and situation of man, we may expect that God, in his revelations and conduct, will satisfy our reason, but not our humours. To make men believe whether they will or no, or to over-rule their humours, in directing them to truth, would be governing us in a manner unsuitable to our natures.

For God, therefore, to withhold stronger means of conviction, after the neglect of sufficient reasons of faith, is common; and, to say the truth, when men are grown hardened against the competent arguments for their faith, there is
ordinarily

ordinarily as little use, as there is justice, in supplying them with more; for, the true cause why they are dissatisfied with those they have already before them, is, not that they are really inconclusive—but, that the conclusion they bring is disagreeable, and more opposite to the *will* than the *understanding*; and they may, with more truth, be said to suppress, than to want, conviction.

This was the case of the Jewish infidels, and is equally so of those among us; who profess infidelity, not through a want of sufficient evidence for faith, but through a hatred of it. They first feel their inclinations set against the commands it brings with it, and then they endeavour to harden their judgments against the proofs that are brought in support of its authority; which they pretend are not sufficient, though the real truth is, that they feel them to be stronger than they care for. And this drives them to the same sorry shifts as the rulers of the Jews were drove to, and puts them upon amusing the people with absurdities, in endeavouring to suppress what they are afraid, and have too much reason to believe, is true.—The tale which the chief priests gave out among the people of the Jews, absurd as it was, is every whit as good for

disbelieving Christ's resurrection, as what our infidels give out among us is for disbelieving the religion which is built upon it. The chief priests tale was a very absurd one:—one would think, that, instead of the soldiers, they were nodding, when they gave it them; and, though I believe our infidels are more waking and watchful in giving their instructions, I do not think they are a bit wiser; their hard-invented tales may, and I believe do, hinder them from sleeping; and those, I am sure, have not their eyes open who suffer themselves to be persuaded by them.

God's conduct, in refusing the Jews the strongest proof of his Son's resurrection, after they had withstood the miracles which had been wrought before them, supplies us with this lesson—that an obstinate neglect of those means which God has allowed us for our instruction and faith, is a just reason for his refusing us any higher assistance;—and, let me add, it is as sure a means of having that withdrawn which we have neglected or misapplied. The former of these bad effects has been already shewn, in the case of the Jewish infidels; and, for the truth of the latter, we need only look among our own, and consider by what steps they have gained the character

ter they are pleased to boast in. No man falls into infidelity through a want of sufficient evidence for faith ; but by a neglect or misapplication of it. For, it is an observation which, I believe, will stand the test — That infidels have been once believers. Whence then arises their infidelity ? Does it arise from hence, that religion will not stand the trial of reason ? or is it, that men first grow angry with religion, because it contradicts their vicious inclinations, and then are afraid to look at the reasons which support it ? After which, with less art than impudence, they demand stronger reasons in recommendation of it, when those they already have before them are more than they want ; — and, glad of the pretence with which the disappointment furnishes them, they retreat into infidelity, though with an outward air of triumph.

In short, when men carefully follow where God directs, they may be assured of arriving at truth and happiness : but when they impertinently demand that God should conduct them where they have a mind to go, they must expect a denial ; and, when left to their own guidance alone, their way to ignorance and destruction is wide and unavoidable.

SERMON

S E R M O N XCVI.

CHRISTIAN FAITH FOUNDED ON REASON-
ABLE EVIDENCE.

I P E T E R iii. 15.

Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you.

IT was a calumny very early thrown against Christianity, at its first appearance, that it was supported by the credulity of those who embraced it.

And the modern enemies of Christianity tell us, that our religion cannot admit alliance with reasoning:—they tell us, that “faith hath nothing to do with the understanding; but is all the work of grace and the Holy Spirit;—that there is no one lesson that the holy Scriptures have taken more care to inculcate,

than that of denying our reason; — and, in short, that a Christian faith is that for which no reason can or even should be given."

Thus the infidel shoots out his arrows, his "bitter words," from the cover of enthusiasm: and, depreciating the use of reason, under a pretended veneration for faith, means to beguile us of both.

It is, however, matter of comfort to find, that the representations these men give us of a Christian faith, are directly contrary to what the Scriptures say about it; which they grossly misapply to serve their purpose. There is no surer symptom of a cause being a bad one, than when we see its advocates betaking themselves to bad measures for supporting it; and infidels would never have recourse to such misrepresentations of religion, as are inconsistent with common honesty, but that they are fully sensible they cannot succeed against it by fair representations and honest arguments.

Our Saviour, when he gave his disciples their commission, said, "Go and teach all nations."—St. Paul says, "How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard, and how shall they hear without a preacher?—So then, faith cometh by hearing."

The

The same Apostle charges Timothy to “give attendance to reading, to doctrine,” not only for the cultivation of his own faith, but that he might “be able to teach others also.”—Christians are frequently exhorted “to teach and admonish one another:”—and, from the very first beginnings of a Christian church, the constant object of its care hath been to provide for the faith of men, by providing for their instruction.

These commands for instructing men in a Christian faith, are insignificant, if faith and reason are not concerned together. Instruction necessarily requires the application of reason, both in him who gives, and in him who receives it.

But farther; as to what modern infidels tell us of a Christian faith—that it is inconsistent with a rational examination and enquiry, and that the Scriptures expressly deny us such use of our reason—nothing can be more false and absurd. St. Paul expressly advises us to “prove all things.” How this can be done without the use of reason, a reasonable man will not be able to comprehend: an infidel, perhaps, may, who is more used to the work of what he calls proving, without any reason to support his proofs.

But what shall we say of the Bereans, who are mentioned in Scripture with particular commendation, for their free enquiry into the truth of what was preached to them? — “These,” says the historian, “were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so: therefore,” says the historian, “many of them believed.” The Bereans faith is here expressly ascribed to the freedom of their enquiry;—so far is it from being true that faith is inconsistent with a rational enquiry.

The truth is, in short, this:—Many have been the open attacks against Christianity; but unsuccessful all. Its enemies, at last, had recourse to stratagem. They pretend an honourable regard for faith; and, on that pretence, set themselves to depreciate the use of human reason in examining it; well knowing, that, if they can once persuade the world that Christianity is no rational religion, their work is done; for then, no man of common sense will think it a religion worth his care. And all this while they hope to shelter themselves from the imputation of being infidels; because they profess themselves advocates for faith,

faith, and talk zealously for the effects of God's grace and Holy Spirit. It is hard to say which is greater—the profaneness, or the weakness, of this stratagem. It is certainly profane, in the highest degree, to pretend a veneration for God's grace and Holy Spirit, only to deride it, and in order to oppose the revelation of his will. And it is, surely, as weak to cover themselves under so thin a stratagem, unless all mankind were as void of common sense in every thing, as these men would have them be in matters of religion. Some may be deceived by them; but whoever gives himself but a little reflection will be sensible, that those who are infidels to reason can never be believers in God's grace and Holy Spirit; which works not in us, but through the instrumentality of our rational faculties. He who can deny the use of his reason, which he feels every moment of his being, can be no sincere advocate for the influence of that Spirit, which he feels no otherwise than as he feels his reason.

Take heed, therefore, how and what ye read. Faith is, indeed, our duty, our guide, and our support; but it is a rational faith in matters of speculation, and a practical faith in consequence of it. Faith may have objects

Q 3

which

which reason cannot reach; but it certainly has others in which reason may be employed: and, whoever extols faith, to the discredit of reason, in such matters as lie within the province of reason, either means to destroy the faith he pretends to advance, or takes a very unwarrantable and weak step to support it.

This, at least, is what they aim at who, with a dissembled gravity, tell us, that a Christian faith depends not on a rational enquiry. If you think they mean that our religious faith is too well supported otherwise, to need any assistance from a rational search into it, you are wide of the mark; they pretend this, indeed, but they really mean, that our religious faith will not stand such a search; and when they artfully say, that Christianity wants not the aid of reason to support it, they mean, that there is nothing in reason to support it. In short, they mean to insinuate, that it is a very irrational absurd sort of an affair.

It is not at all surprising, that men who practise dissimulation in pursuit of a dishonest cause, should meet with embarrassment. This is the case of these men. They pretend a veneration for faith, that they may discredit the application of reason, in enquiring into the merits

rits of religion; afraid, as they are, that such an application will work the same effect upon those who set about it, as it did upon the Beræans; and only serve to promote the faith which they want to destroy. Now, in consequence of their professed veneration for the Christian faith, they must admit the Scriptures; and therefore, in order to gain their favourite point of discrediting the use of human reason, they must press the Scriptures into their service. But there lies their embarrassment;—how to make the Scriptures discredit the application of reason, when in every page they admit, recommend, and require the ingenuous and free use of it.—And this is an embarrassment which they can no more conceal than they can conquer.

The text I have chosen, directly overthrows a capital observation which these men are fond of amusing us with—which is, that the bulk of mankind are not qualified to set about a rational examination of their faith.—They would have us think, that the nature and evidence of Christianity stands on such points, in which it is impossible to give any rational decision, without a good natural turn for reasoning, and even some very considerable ac-

quisitions in learning; endowments which do not belong to the bulk of mankind.

Now, the Apostle's advice, in my text, is plainly general; nor is it at all to be supposed, from the design of the epistle, that he means to confine it only to men of parts and learning. The advice is certainly intended for general notice, to be followed by all Christians, learned or unlearned. And, surely, holy Scripture would not set that before us, as a general duty, which mankind in general are incapable of performing: nor is it true, that an examination into the reasons of our Christian faith, is a work above the general capacity of mankind.

Every body is not equally qualified to examine and judge of all particulars contained in the Christian revelation; to undertake a minute discussion of its several doctrines, to trace them regularly through all their proper connections and consequences; and to enter into an elaborate examination of every difficulty and objection. This the generality of mankind may not find either leisure or abilities to undertake; nor is all this necessary for coming at a rational belief in Christianity.

All

All that is necessary for that, is, so far to understand the proofs, on which our Christian faith is built, as may make it reasonable for us to receive it, and to form our behaviour by it; and the abilities requisite for this are such, that there is scarce a man who would not be offended at being thought deficient in them. They are the same abilities of common sense and reason, by which every man acquits himself in the ordinary business of the world; and whoever applies them in examining the proofs of his faith, with the same attention that he uses in other matters, will find as little difficulty in the one as in the other.

There are few men, but what think they have abilities sufficient to qualify them for serving upon a jury; at least, our laws suppose, that the generality of men, even of the lower sort, are furnished with such abilities. And yet, there are many causes tried before a common jury, which require more nice attention and discernment than the examination of the proofs on which our Christian faith is built.

Evidences of matters of fact (which are the ground and reason of a Christian faith) are things which ordinary understandings may comprehend;

comprehend; and there is scarce any body who is not every day exercised in considering them, and in forming both his judgment and conduct by them. Living evidences of facts, it is true, carry the most force with them; but where the facts lie too far backward in time for living evidences to reach them, a written evidence of them may be so circumstanced, that the most ordinary capacity may perceive the force of it, and may see it reasonable to believe the facts upon that evidence.

The main proof on which our Christian faith is built, is the evidence of Christ's disciples, who conversed with him, and who were eye-witnesses of the several facts belonging to his life: and in order to be satisfied with this evidence, or to feel it reasonable to admit it, there are but two points which call for our enquiry. These points are—1. How are we satisfied that we have the evidence of Christ's disciples before us? And, 2. How are we satisfied that this evidence is a true one?

Had we the disciples of Christ personally before us, there would be no difficulty in the first point; and, as we have only their written evidence before us, this may be so circumstanced as to remove all reasonable difficulty;
so

so that an ordinary capacity may feel sufficient reason for admitting it.

It is a general and a reasonable maxⁿ, with all mankind, to admit credible and authentic records as containing the real evidence of those who recorded them; and therefore, if an ordinary capacity can be made to see, that the written evidence of Christ's disciples is a credible and authentic record, it will of course feel sufficient reason for admitting it as the real evidence of those disciples.

But here, you will say, lies the difficulty. — This evidence is written in a learned language; and is of so very ancient date, that it may be all a forgery; how then can persons of an ordinary capacity be satisfied that it is an authentic record, when they cannot read it, and are not qualified to judge whether it be a forgery?

Supposing this to be the case exactly (which, however, it is not, for men of ordinary capacity can both read it, and judge of its being genuine :)—but suppose they can do neither, I say, that the concurrent testimony of those who can read this record, and the concurrent assent of those who are qualified to judge of its being genuine, would reasonably induce

induce a common understanding to admit it. We think it reasonable, in a thousand instances, to admit one evidence through the intermediate testimony of another; and nothing is more usual, than to be satisfied that a book is genuine, upon the general consent of learned men, though we cannot read a letter in it, nor are at all able of ourselves to prove that it is no forgery.

But the truth is, that persons of ordinary capacity may read this record; as it is translated for them. But this, you will say, is taking it upon a presumption that the translation is a just one. True; but the presumption is so highly reasonable, that any one ought to be governed by it. A man of the most ordinary capacity must be satisfied, that there have been more persons in the world who understand Greek, besides those who translated the Gospels; nor can he imagine, that all who do understand Greek, are combined to keep up that as a translation which is none. The English reader, therefore, may reasonably be satisfied, that he reads this record as fully as the Greek scholar does; because, was it otherwise, it would be impossible to conceal it.

As

As to the probability, that this record, in its original language, may be all a forgery; besides the concurrent judgment of learned and able men in this matter, a man of ordinary abilities, and no learning, may judge for himself upon it. He who is not qualified to draw up a proof, may be very capable of understanding one that is drawn up and set before him.

A man of ordinary capacity may surely understand, when he is told, that the Gospels, the records of our religion now before us, have been extant, and their authority always acknowledged, from the times in which they ~~pretend to be~~^{were} written, down to the present age; and that several copies of them were very early dispersed into different parts of the world. There is nothing in this but what any man may understand; and, if this be proved to him, his own judgment, I presume, will incline him to admit them as genuine. Now, if, in order to prove this to him, he be told (nay, he may be shewn) that several persons, whose writings are come down to us, which are allowed to be genuine, and who lived in or near the times when these records were drawn up, were acquainted with
them,

them, have mentioned and have quoted them ; and that others have given large accounts and made great use of them ;—if he is shewn, from undoubted history, that the several churches, in different parts of the world, all received these records ; that the very enemies of Christianity admitted these to be the records of it ; that the several sects among Christians, however differing in other matters, always agreed in admitting the Gospels as a genuine record ;—I say, a man of ever so common understanding may be told or shewn all this, and more, to prove to him the genuineness of the sacred records ; and, if he is plainly shewn it, will easily understand it, and as readily feel it reasonable to admit them as the real evidence of Christ's disciples.—He may be told, that some persons have attempted to discredit the authority of this record ; but when he is shewn by what methods they have attempted it, and that their arguments against the authority of the Scripture are equally good against the authority of all books in the world, he will feel little reason for inclining to their party.

If the external reason we have for the evidence of our faith do not lie beyond the reach

reach of an ordinary understanding, much less will the internal. If we can satisfy ourselves that the records we have before us do really contain the evidence of Christ's disciples, we shall have no difficulty to be satisfied that the evidence they have given is a true one. It may require some attention to find out these witnesses, (*i. e.* to be satisfied we have them before us); but it certainly will not require great parts and learning, after we have found them, to discover whether they talk like honest men.

The most ordinary reader may see, from the writings of the Evangelists, that they were good men, men of probity, piety, and simplicity, who had no worldly interests in view, and whose whole conduct is the farthest from imposture that can be imagined; after which, a man need not the assistance of refined study to know what opinion he should form of their evidence; nor does it require great discernment to conclude, that men, so disposed as they were, would not deliberately contrive such a series of extraordinary facts, merely to impose upon the world—or that, so situated as they were, they could have done it if they would.

I will conclude with taking the liberty to put a case, in some sort explanatory of what I have been saying.

Suppose an old record should be produced in a court of justice, as containing the principal evidence of certain facts, which are the subject of enquiry; which record not one of the jury can read, or is in the least qualified, from his own abilities, to prove is a genuine one.— Suppose this record to be read intelligibly to the jury, and they find it contains the evidence of certain persons, under their hand-writing, who were eye-witnesses of the facts in question, and who seem, upon comparing the account they give of themselves with the account they give of the facts, to have been very honest, unprejudiced men.— Suppose too, that the learned counsel on one side should, in the course of the trial, inform the jury what reasons there are for believing this record to be genuine, and that the reasons they produce are such as, in cases of a like nature, have been always allowed sufficient to prove other records to be genuine; whilst the counsel on the other side, though very desirous to prove it a forgery, can only produce such objections against this record as
will

will stand with equal force against all records whatever:—I would ask, what a jury of good men and true would feel upon this occasion? I would ask, whether they are not qualified to bring in a verdict upon such a case? and, if they declare that they believe the facts to be true, upon the evidence they have heard from that record, I would ask, whether such a verdict be not a good one?

S E R M O N XCVII.

NECESSITY OF READING THE
SCRIPTURES.

P S A L M CXIX. 105.

*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light
unto my path.*

THIS reflection of the Psalmist's is a strong reason for constantly reading the holy Scriptures. The way to a discharge of our duty is to know what it is; and the way to know what our duty is, is to look where it is most clearly set before us; and, who can set our duty before us more clearly than God himself?—The Scriptures are the word of God.

By constantly reading the Scriptures, is not meant that we should read, or do, nothing else; but that we should read them often enough to know and to apply what they contain.

tain. And this we should do under all conditions of life, as every condition has not only the general duty of leading a good life, but the particular duties belonging to it.

The church of Rome, indeed, forbids the common people the reading of the Scriptures;—but, as the church of Rome has nothing to do with us, nor we with the church of Rome, I shall not mis-spense my time, and your attention, in exposing the absurdity and impiety of such prohibition.

There are, it is true, different conditions and different capacities among us; all have not equal time or ability for studying the Scriptures, and thoroughly understanding them; but many have time for reading in them more than they apply, as well as ability for understanding so much of them, as it is necessary they should know to make them good men, though not scholars and disputants;—characters, which, however useful in this life, will be useless in the next. At Christ's tribunal we shall be examined, not for our scholarship, but for the discharge of our duty; not how we have *studied*, but how we have *lived*.

As none are excluded from reading the Scriptures, so all may be benefited and improved

proved by reading them. It was long ago observed, and is still true, that “there is depth enough in them to exercise the wise, and plainness enough to instruct the weak; being like a river, having its shallows and depths, where the lamb may wade, and the elephant swim.”

A religious mind (which the meanest among us may have, and the best endowed among us may, and too often do, want) as it is a necessary, so it is the most effectual qualification for reading the Scriptures with satisfaction, and to our proper improvement. Reading the Scriptures, indeed, naturally leads men to be religious; but those who come to the reading them, prepared with a religious mind, more sensibly and effectually feel them to be what the Psalmist describes them—“a lamp unto their feet, and a light unto their path.”

By a religious mind, I mean the having a right notion of God and of ourselves; that God governs us; and that it is both our duty and our interest to do what we know to be his will and command, though, through the weakness and depravity of our nature, we are too apt to disobey his will, and follow our own. This notion, that God governs us, and that we are to obey him, residing in the mind,

opens it to the observance of what the Scripture sets before us of the Providence of God, and makes us attentive to the lessons it gives us for obeying him in the conduct of a good life, and to the examples it gives us of his infinite power, goodness, and wisdom, in his government over us.

It were profane, in taking up the Scriptures, to shew them less respect than we shew other books; but it will not be to our religious improvement, if we shew them no more. The title they carry demands much more. They are the word of God.—We should not read them upon no better motive than merely for our amusement, or merely for acquiring a knowledge of what they contain: these motives, both allowable and necessary, should be attended by others of higher importance; namely, the great end and design for which they are set before us; the goodness and wisdom of God in setting them before us; and the consideration, that our own happiness, our eternal happiness, is concerned in our diligent use and application of them. “Search the Scriptures, for in them ye have”, direction for coming at “eternal life.”

When we there read of the power and justice of God, his threatenings against sin, and
of

of his presence in all places, if we not only read, but consider (without which our reading not only has no use or merit, but carries with it high affront) it must make us fear and tremble to offend God by presumptuous sins. When we read the exhortations and encouragements to piety and virtue, which we find in Scripture, it naturally makes us reflect and examine our behaviour, how far it is suitable to what is there recommended—and calls up our endeavours to repair what we find deficient in it. When we read of God's goodness and mercy over all his works; of his gracious promises of mercy and forgiveness to those who suitably and sincerely seek it; and that "God so loved us, as to send his Son to die for us;" how does it cherish our hopes of pardon, on our true repentance and amendment! When we read, that God is a father to his servants, and will make all things work together for good to them, and that Christ Jesus, his beloved Son, endured the cross (and that for our salvation) what comfort will such consideration, duly followed, and taken to our hearts, afford us under the two great, and the only great evils that hover round us in this state of trial and exercise—our sins, and our afflictions! What a lesson for repentance under

der the one, and of patience under the other! —It is with these sentiments in our minds that we should read the Scriptures; remembering always, that, whilst we are reading them, we have God and his Son Christ Jesus speaking to us :—whom can we better hear, and what ought we to be who hear him! especially when we consider (what we should constantly keep in mind whilst we are reading the Scriptures) that by the very same word which now instructs and directs us, by the same word (according as we have here improved in our religious behaviour) we shall hereafter be judged, at the last day.

This consideration should dash the profane wit of those who ridicule the Scriptures; should rouse the attention of the indolent and licentious, who never trouble themselves about the Scriptures; and should comfort and direct those who read and who regard them. Satisfied, as such are, that God has laid the Scriptures before them, to lead them through duty to happiness (to happiness eternal!) they will not suffer themselves to be diverted from attending to them; and, in that attention, will feel themselves open to the information the Scriptures give them of what is their duty, and both ready and constant in a regular discharge

charge of it.—Our attention to the Scriptures, had it no higher effect upon the mind, has this very useful one, that it draws us from looking too intensely on the world. We cannot, at the same instant, look intensely on the world and on the happiness of heaven :—as the reading the Scriptures, therefore, withdraws our attention from the world, it is a step towards fixing it on heaven ; the less we think of what is about us, the better prepared we are for looking at what is before us.—The mind will, the mind must, attend to something ; and, as no duty can be performed without attention to it, that employment of the mind, which directs it where duty, and consequently where happiness, lies, is certainly to be chosen ; and the reading the Scriptures, as it employs the mind on what shews us our duty here, and our happiness both here and hereafter, is, beyond all doubt, to be chosen and pursued.

All men, indeed, do not read the Scriptures alike ; and (as I have already said) a religious mind is the most effectual qualification for reading them with true success ; that is, for making us good men.—To read the Scriptures only to find matter of objection against them, is detestable ; and such who do so, can-

not properly be said to read the Scriptures; which we then only properly read, when we use, not when we abuse, them. Nor can others be said properly to read the Scriptures, who read them only to find matter of argument to support a party or faction, or to support false tenets. They only can be said properly to read the Scriptures, who read them with a view and purpose to make themselves good men.

As to those who read the Scriptures to criticise and expound them, we must be careful what we say.—Doubtless, there are both learned critics, and sound expositors of Scripture—the world is obliged to them—the world gives them praise; and they deserve it: but they will give me leave to say, that a good Christian is a character far above them both;—if, in pursuit of their criticisms and expositions, they attain that character, it is well; if not, the world, indeed, may be the wiser for their learned pains, but they themselves will not be the better for them.—The good and exemplary life, whether of a learned or unlearned Christian, is the best exposition of Scripture—best shews us what Christian religion is, and most effectually excites us to apply it.

Those

Those parts of Scripture which shew us our salvation, on what it depends, and how we may obtain it, are plain and intelligible to all; else, all had not been commanded to attend to them; nor would Christ have chosen illiterate fishermen for his first disciples, if none but scholars could be saved.

Success in reading the Scriptures (I mean that success which sets us in a good life) depends much on our own disposition and manner of reading them. I have already said, we should not read them merely for our amusement; though, when the Scriptures are properly read, they will give the mind a very high, but it will be a very religious delight—when we read them, not merely for a vain amusement, but with a serious and devout attention—with a sincere approbation of the good lessons and good examples they set before us, and with as sincere a desire of practising and imitating them, where practicable and imitable;—for, as some examples are set forth in Scripture not for us to imitate, but to avoid (such are all bad examples) so there are some good examples there, which are beyond our reach to imitate: yet they are useful; as they may put us upon thinking, though they do not put us upon action, and
suggest

suggest thoughts which will help us much where we may and ought to act.

An humble mind is a very requisite disposition for reading the Scriptures with proper success; that is, for being made better men by reading them. If any one is so proud, as to think he does not want the assistance of God's word for making him a good man (that is, such a good man as God proposes to accept) the light, with which God's word assists the steps of others, will make such a man stumble to his confusion; for, he will either shut his eyes against that light, or he will try to extinguish it.—Foolish both!—the latter wicked as well as foolish.—For, is man as wise and good as God? nay, is he wiser than God, and more able and ready to provide for him? God hath provided for man's salvation—man (that is, some men) dislike the provision God hath made—even for man's salvation.—Strange!—The Scriptures are the light which shews us the divine provision that is made for our salvation, and assists us, not only in looking at that salvation, but in getting up to it. This, sure, is reason, strong and cogent, for our having the Scriptures constantly open before us, and for guarding the mind against that pride, that self-sufficiency,

ciency, which would shut the Scriptures against us, or make us turn our back upon them.

The humble-minded man will not be served.—He is fully sensible of his own inability to save himself;—and, in spite of philosophic pride, however learned, in spite of profane ridicule, however witty—withstanding the business, notwithstanding the pleasures, of the world, he will not be debarred from reading the holy Scriptures, or carelessly turn his back upon them; but will eagerly open them to see (since he feels he cannot save himself) to see, I say, and to reverence, the provision God hath made for saving him.

He will there see, and he will reverence, what God hath done for man; he will see too, and he will remember, what man should do for himself.—The merciful, the wonderful work of God, in our salvation—how he has wrought from the beginning of the world, and how he purposes to work till the consummation of man's eternal happiness—is not more clearly displayed in the Scriptures, than is *man's duty* set forth there, by the performance of which he is appointed to obtain the salvation wrought for him, though, by his
own

own doings, he cannot deserve it—but only through the merits and the love of Christ, the Son of God, who left the bosom of his Father, to undergo hardships in our nature, and a most painful death, to procure man the happiness of heaven and eternal life.

Both these—the work of God, and the duty of man—are fully displayed in the holy Scriptures; which, therefore, not only deserve, but demand, our constant attention. They are the light which must guide our steps through this short life, to an eternal one:—but, alas! there are too many of us “who love darkness rather than light,” in this, though short, yet hazardous passage, or who prefer their own feeble and false tapers to the lustre which Providence has provided for their guidance.

The present age is an age of much reading; but little knowledge—such as deserves to be called so. The humble Christian, with his piety and common sense, in reading the Scriptures, better knows his way through this world to heaven, than the learned moralist can shew him;—nor should we boast an enlightened age, if we set aside the Scriptures, and light up novels and romances to direct us. But,

“Blessed Lord ! who hast caused (not these vain conceits, but) the holy Scriptures, to be written for our learning, grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that, by patience and comfort of thy holy word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ.”—To whom, &c.

[illegible]

S E R M O N XCVIII.

CONSIDERATIONS ON GOD'S JUDGMENTS,
AND THE PROPER IMPROVEMENT OF
THEM POINTED OUT *.

ISAIAH xxvi. 9.

When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.

THEN or never. — For, what can reform, or even touch, those, who are not only ungrateful under God's blessings, but incorrigible under his judgments ?

Yet history shews, that men will be exceedingly wicked under the severest afflictions that Providence may think fit to lay upon them. An ancient historian, in his account of a plague at Athens, is as particular in describing the wickedness, as he is in describing the miseries, of the people under that affliction ;

* Preached about the beginning of the year 1781, on account of the recent hurricane in Jamaica.

VOL. III.

S

and,

and, if our own historians inform us truly, the same circumstance was observable in the plague, which, above a century ago, laid waste this metropolis.

And not only history, but daily experience, confirms the observation. We see individuals, wicked and vicious men, who are not less, but more so, under the natural punishment of their vices, which are the judgments of God, than they were before; and we see nations, which are but individuals in the scale of Providence, more abandoned under their destruction, than they were in pulling it down.

This may be accounted for.—When men become wicked enough to deserve God's punishments, he withdraws his grace, and gives them up to a reprobate mind; which, being thus closely connected with the judgments of Providence, may as well foretel, as follow, them; so that, when we see a nation profligate in their manners, we have the same reason to fear the judgments of Providence upon it, as, when we see it ruined, we have to believe that its ruin is the consequence of its profligacy.

We have now entered into a new year.—If we recollect the events of the last (and, surely,

surely, we shall not soon forget them) we must recollect instances, both of the judgments, and of the mercies, of Providence. They attended each other, in the dreadful tumults in June; they attended each other in the dreadful hurricanes in October:—the former, the work of wicked men, the latter, the work of an offended, but a merciful God. But, how long the judgments and mercy of God will thus accompany each other, or how soon our behaviour may provoke the Almighty to send down his judgments upon us, unaccompanied with his mercy, is what the solemnity of this day calls upon us seriously to consider.

The present situation of this kingdom is alarming; attacked, as it is, with rebellion and perfidy abroad, and with faction, treachery, and malice, at home. These, as they do not operate without the permission of Providence, may well be reckoned among his judgments.—And, surely, the heaviest and the sharpest rod, which God makes for the chastisement of man, is that which he makes up of men—especially when it is made up of our own countrymen. The worst foes, which either a family or a nation can have, are those of its own household. It is an observation, which

holds in the political, as well as natural world, that the best things, when they become bad, are the worst; and the subjects of any government, which are its best support and ornament, whilst they continue loyal and peaceable, are its greatest disgrace, and its surest destruction, when they become otherwise.

But we have seen, that God can employ the elements, as well as men, for the instruments of his anger; and, whilst contending nations are striving for superiority over each other, at the same time that they are both abusing the blessings, and provoking the anger, of Providence, the Almighty interposes his superiority over both—and “scatters them with the blast of his displeasure.”

In this situation, with no friends abroad, with too many enemies at home, and the very elements in force against us—what is our behaviour? Do these judgments, alarming as they are, teach us sobriety, righteousness, and peace? or, Does not our licentiousness encrease, as the Almighty heightens his judgments against us?—High as the growth of vice and immorality is got among us—high enough, long since, to be sufficient for awakening the Divine anger—they have, of late,

late, been still more assisted in their growth, not merely by a neglect of religion, which ever attends immorality, but by an open defiance of it.—Vice and irreligion, instead of retiring from the eye of government (for there was once something like modesty in both) are now indulged in every method they may choose, not only for walking abroad with impunity, but for assuming authority :—they open their schools; and their professors set themselves forth in public, to dispute and decide in favour of iniquity, and in defiance of religion and government. — The malicious contrivance *this* of such men, whose aim and study it is to subvert both,

The state will judge for itself, how far it is consistent with its safety and dignity, to permit such assemblies to discuss what ought to be obeyed, and to declaim, argue, and decide against those who are set over them. And God will surely judge for himself, how far he will resent the impiety and profaneness of setting up lectures of infidelity, in a country where He has established the Gospel of his Son Jesus Christ.

And, as if this was not enough to offend the Almighty, or as if men cared not how much the Almighty is offended, they come forth

forth from their assemblies, to bid defiance both to God's authority, and the laws of their country, by their profanation of the Sabbath—appointing that day for a rendezvous of folly, if not of vice and debauchery, which is set apart for the honour of God and of religion.

Under the prevalence of these enormities, it may be the state is less blameable than the people; who, if we may judge from the events of the last year, seem to be arrived at a temper and behaviour scarce manageable under a free government; which is, indeed, the best sort of government; but it is only so over the best sort of subjects.—Right government is that which is adapted to the nature of the subjects that are to be governed. Different tempers will require different government;—and there are tempers among mankind, which behave better under a severe than under a mild government—under a restraint, which obliges them to do as they ought, than under a claim of being free to do as they please.

But be that as it may—these enormities are grievous to sober and well-disposed men; whose number, bad as the times are, merits regard; and, if it may be had, protection
from

from such offences as disturb their enjoyment of the best religion, under the best government in the world.

Nor are these licentious practices offensive only to good men ;—they must be highly offensive to God ; as they are most ungrateful returns for the blessings with which God hath distinguished, and, as yet, continues to distinguish, this nation.—Whether the *commission* of these practices, or the *permission* of them, gives God the greater offence, God only knows ; but when they both conspire, we have reason to fear, that they are sufficient for provoking him to lay aside his blessings, and load us with his judgments.

The judgments of God are tremendous ;—nor is there a more awful or useful reflection, than what the late dreadful hurricane in the West Indies sets before us ; which shews us the power of God, and how soon we are crushed under his Almighty hand.

The distress which those have suffered, on whom the hand of God hath so severely fallen, is astonishing indeed, and highly pitiable ; but the mischief reacheth home to ourselves, and we feel more than pity for their calamity ;—but, can we feel a reason why we should be only distant sharers of the mischief, and

spared from being actually overwhelmed in the like distress? Is the arm of the Almighty so short, that it cannot reach us? Are the rods of his anger confined to particular climates? Are they only hurricanes that can destroy us? or, Are not the judgments of God as extensive as his power, and his hand ready to avenge himself on those who provoke him, wherever they are? — What shall we say then?—Are we better than they? Do we provoke the Almighty less than they?—No, in no wise.

Some, indeed, think, God hath no hand in these events; or, if he has, that it is superstition to call them judgments. The Scriptures, would they read them, would teach them otherwise;—unless they, who think thus, be of that sort, who no more believe in God's Scriptures, than they believe in his judgments;—which, perhaps, may be too much the case. The Scripture fully sets forth God as presiding over all human events. It may be wrong, perhaps, to call ordinary events judgments (though there are more of them that are truly such than we are aware of); and, with respect to extraordinary events, though we should not be hasty in ascertaining, and peremptorily deciding, the particular purpose of Providence
in

in producing them; yet God himself has declared his general purpose in producing them, as punishments for the misbehaviour of men.—The remark in my text is built on this notion, and is of no amount without it;—for, how should “the inhabitants of the world” learn righteousness from the judgments of God, if God did not send his judgments to punish their unrighteousness?

The Scriptures sufficiently assure us of God’s government of the world about us, and of his dispensing the natural good and evil belonging to it; in particular, they inform us, that “storms and tempests fulfil his will,” and are directed to serve his purposes in his government of mankind. Whether God himself immediately directs natural causes to produce their natural effects, or, whether God employs some intermediate ministration, under his controul, it amounts to the same thing; the truth is the same; and the use to be made of it is the same—the events are still of God’s sending.—They are sent as judgments;—and we ought to “learn righteousness” from them.

The Scriptures set forth God as Supreme Governor of the world; yet, as having “miserable spirits” under him; they set forth,
too,

too, the great enemy of God and of mankind, who has his ministers under him, to work all the mischief they are permitted to work under God's superior controul over them.

These evil spirits, by their pride and rebellion, lost their first estate in heaven. This fact the Scriptures acquaint us with; though they do not acquaint us with the circumstances of it. They are doomed to eternal chains hereafter; but, at present, are permitted to inhabit the air around us, and are busy on the earth among us, but under God's superior controul; and, it may be, not without the check and interposition of God's "ministering spirits," who are busy around us, to help us, and to do us good. These spiritual beings, both good and bad, cannot be visible to us; but they are concerned in the good and evil, both natural and moral, which we do and suffer; yet not so concerned, as to over-rule the free agency of our nature.—Evil spirits cannot work more natural mischief about us, than what God permits, nor can they work more moral mischief within us, than what we ourselves consent to.—Their powers are doubtless great in the natural world. When Satan had God's permission to work mischief upon Job, among other instances of his power, he

raised a great wind, which smote the four corners of the house, where his sons and daughters were assembled, and destroyed them all. And, when David is describing how God executed his anger against the disobedient, he says—"He cast upon them the furiousness of his wrath, by sending evil angels among them."—No one, indeed, may venture to assert, that the late dreadful mischiefs in the West Indies were *thus* wrought; but then, on the other hand, no one may venture to assert that they were *not* so wrought: and, if any one, from examples of the like operations in Scripture, should believe they were so wrought, no one has a right to reprove him for his belief, nor does such belief merit reproof.

Such belief leads to a very useful lesson, worth our attention:—For, that, in our present state, we are exposed to the suggestions of wicked spirits, is Scripture truth; and is as easily reconcileable to the good government of God, as that we are exposed to the suggestions of wicked men;—the suggestions of both are under the controul of our own reason and religion, if we have and will apply them.—But, how little we of this nation have

have applied either, is too apparent from our conduct; the enormities of which have arisen to that height, that we can hardly account for them upon the common principle of human weakness and depravity, without imputing them to the suggestion of evil spirits; whose chief study is to promote wickedness and disorder among us, both private and public, that they may obtain their chief aim, which is our destruction; and which, whenever the Almighty thinks fit to withhold his restraint upon them, and say, "Go forth," they are ready and eager to execute: for, that evil spirits are permitted, as God sees fit, to punish us for our misbehaviour, is also a Scripture truth; which, perhaps, in the fullness of our folly, we may overlook, if not deride; but which, in the utmost fullness of our wisdom, we are not able to disprove.

Mark, then, the accuracy of Divine justice, in God's government over us, when he employs those evil spirits to punish our misbehaviour, whose suggestions we have followed in committing it. This method in the government of Providence is observable in more instances than may now be set forth; but, wherever it is discoverable, it shews, what
the

the libertine philosopher is averse to own—that the natural events of life may be, and often are, the just judgments of God.

I will not trespass upon your patience, by enlarging farther on a topic, the bare mention of which, perhaps, at this time of day, will scarce be allowed—under such abundance of learning in some, so much profligacy in more, and such want of religion in most.—I will only say, that, so long as there are men, there will be wickedness in the world; and, if there be a wise and just God, who made and governs mankind, there will be reason, and it is sound religion, to say, that God, notwithstanding the provision he hath made for punishing the wickedness of men hereafter, may inflict his judgments for punishing it in the present state. The probability of which is not set aside by the consideration that we live under a course of natural causes and effects;—on the contrary, it is strongly confirmed by the consideration, that this course of natural causes and effects is absolutely under God's power and direction, who can as easily, and with equal right, direct them to serve the *extraordinary*, as the *ordinary*, purposes of his government.

And, when God thinks fit to do so, when the elements, under which he hath placed us
to

to live, by extraordinary commotions are made the instruments of our death; it is to no purpose to enquire philosophically, whether God himself immediately causes them, or by what intermediate ministration they are caused;—and, to as little purpose is it to deny they are sent for our punishment, when we feel they are sent for our destruction.

It will be to much better purpose to consider seriously, if the natural events of life may be applied as the judgments of God upon us, how we may best avoid them. If they fall upon us from God's displeasure against us for our bad behaviour, they are certainly best avoided by our sincere desire and endeavour to please him by our good behaviour.—But, how is this to be done?—We all know, if we will reflect;—nor is it a difficult work, if we feel a sincere desire to set about it;—nor will it be unsuccessful, if we resolutely persist in it.

Let me only say—

It cannot be pleasing to God, if we shew a total forgetfulness of him—if we reject or disregard the religion which his Son, our Saviour, hath set before us; or, which amounts to the same thing, if we neglect applying it

to the regulation of our conduct.—Yet, this is too much seen in the higher stations of life, which should shew good examples, as well as in the lower stations, which ever will follow bad ones.

It cannot be pleasing to God, that men should maliciously disturb the government under which his Providence hath placed them; and, to gratify ambitious revenge, assist its enemies to destroy it.

It cannot be pleasing to God, when men neglect the duties of their stations to run after faction;—when, instead of promoting peace, order, and harmony in society, they are eager to stir up discontent, tumult, and rage;—when they throw aside the Scriptures, which would make them “wise unto salvation,” and addict themselves to the study of inflammatory news-papers, which make them mad unto destruction;—when they frequent licentious assemblies, where they encourage each other in their hatred of God, religion, and government, instead of resorting to church, where they might learn to reverence and esteem them.

These things cannot be pleasing to God:—these, it is much to be feared, have contributed

buted to awaken his anger and judgments against us :—and, whether God will set aside his judgments, till we have set aside our provocations, God only knows—but we should well consider,

S E R M O N XCIX.

THE OBLIGATIONS TO BENEVOLENCE;
A CHARITY-SERMON.

ROMANS xiii. 8:

*Owe no man any thing, but to love
one another.*

IT is the excellency of the Gospel, that whilst it sets before us the means of our salvation through Christ, it inculcates the duties of civil life; thus leading us through social happiness here, to eternal happiness hereafter.

At first preaching the gospel, some mistook the liberty it promulged; and, because it set men free from the yoke of the Jewish law, were for concluding, that it likewise set them free from the obligations of human government.

Men are more fond of liberty, than attentive to the true nature of it; for which reason, its busiest advocates often prove its worst enemies.

Christian liberty, so far as it set men out of the bondage of Jewish ceremonies, was a necessary means for promoting the religion which Christ taught; but had it discharged men of all restraint under human government, it must have destroyed that religion, which can no more subsist without government, than the enjoyment of life and safety can: and, if men are not satisfied with liberty, till they are free to do what they like, they will get out of the reach of all virtue and all religion, as well as of all restraint, and will find themselves in worse slavery under such liberty, than they are under the restraint of government, and the direction of religion, and in the cultivation of the duties belonging to both.

The Apostle, therefore, is earnest in removing this mistake, and in recommending a strict discharge of civil as well as religious duties. Civil duties are moral duties, strictly so; and in the chapter of my text, the Apostle enjoins the former, under the recommendation of the latter; where he selects two general duties, which are the foundation of civil government, and comprehend in them every duty of social morality:—They are *justice* and *benevolence*.

Christian

T

The

The former, the Apostle recommends under this precept—"Render to all their dues:" under which he comprehends the duties which subjects owe the magistrate, as well as those which subjects owe to one another. These are all contained under the general notion of justice; for justice is obedience to law: obedience to Divine law, properly so called, takes the name of religion; obedience to human law, though it is not definitively religion, yet is practically and consequentially so. The end proposed by human law is the due behaviour of men one towards another; but this end cannot be attained, if men owe no obedience or regard to the authority which enjoins this behaviour. Such, therefore, are greatly mistaken, who satisfy their consciences with a partial discharge of this duty, and lay claim to the character of good men, whilst they shew themselves bad subjects. The Apostle, as if he was aware that his precept might suffer by a limitation, explains it at large: "Render to all their dues; tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour."

The other general duty, the duty of benevolence, the Apostle recommends under the

276 *The Obligations to Benevolence: Serm. 99.*

short precept of loving one another; which he connects with the duty of justice, in the words of my text—"Owe no man any thing, " but to love one another."

There must needs be another principle for society to stand upon, besides the principle of justice; because justice only secures such conduct as others have a *right* to demand of us; and so far secures the safety of men, as it prevents the mischiefs that may hurt or spoil society; but the blessings which improve society, and make men happy, as well as safe, must arise from another part of our conduct—from such actions, as others may rather *wish* for than *demand* of us, and which cannot be supplied but from a principle of benevolence as well as justice.

These important duties are founded on moderation and humility.—The practice both of justice and of benevolence respects the good of others; which we cannot promote, but under a moderation in the pursuit of our own; an unreasonable regard for ourselves, necessarily excludes a reasonable regard for others; and the common breaches of both these duties are easily traced up to this source.—Fraud and violence, jealousies and tumults, evidently spring from the selfish pride of men; and, va-
rious

rious as the occasions are, which produce disorders, we must take the Apostle's direction for finding the true cause of them—"Come they not hence, even from our lusts?"

Fair pretences, indeed, are always ready for colouring disorders; but bad men are always worst, when they pretend what is good. History shews, when even religion and a love of our country have been the banners for leading up mischiefs which savages would blush at; and Faction, in the dress of Liberty, has seduced a people into confusion and tyranny. The truth is, the best occasions of public commotions, whatever good they may have in their consequences, will have something bad in their operations. Where men are concerned, the passions of men will not be idle: envy and pride, if they do not lead, will further the work; will make men restless, and deaf to the suggestions of social virtue, which are not heard in a tumult, and are only attended to under moderation and humility, where a freedom from selfish pride leaves the mind at ease, under the restraints of justice, and open to the duties of benevolence.

These duties are of equal obligation, though, upon a competition between them, justice should take place of benevolence; not be-

cause justice is of greater obligation, but because, in the natural order of things, it is first to be performed. But, though these duties are of equal obligation, they are not of equal extent; benevolence is a duty much more extensive than justice: justice may be so discharged, that nothing more remains to be done; but benevolence is never so discharged: a man may be out of debt, at times, for what justice demands; but never for what benevolence requires of him. "Owe no man any thing," says the Apostle, "but to love one another;" implying, that the debt of mutual benevolence can never be wholly discharged, though other debts may; which must needs be the case, when we consider, that debts of justice are limited to particular stations, and to particular acts in those stations; but the debt of mutual benevolence is not limited to particular stations, but reaches to all the wants of all mankind, so far as they come within our notice, and within our abilities.

This benevolence, which, in its operations, fills all mankind, is that love, which, the Apostle says, "fulfils the law." The whole law, which God hath given us, is comprehended in the love of God, and of our neighbour.

bour. Now, as our love of God consists in obeying his commands, it follows, that in loving our neighbour (which is a duty God hath commanded us) we discharge our love to God, and to our neighbour too. This, then, is fulfilling the law.—Farther; as the whole duty of loving our neighbour is comprehended in the duties of justice and benevolence, a due discharge of the latter carries with it a full discharge of both; because a due discharge of benevolence, necessarily secures the discharge of justice too; for, if we love others so, as to be ready to do them all the good we can, we shall never do them hurt by any particular acts of injustice;—the disposition that leads us to work good, cannot lead us to work evil, to mankind.

In the conduct of our lives, there is room for every man's reflection, if not to enquire how far he is injurious to others, at least to enquire how far he advances in the opposite virtue of doing them good. Such enquiry is the more necessary, because we are too apt to content ourselves with the negative virtue of *not hurting* our neighbour, without employing our endeavours in the positive virtue of *serving* him. However well turned our temper of

mind may be towards the duty of doing good, and however well enabled we may be for doing that good, which our station in life sets before us, we have natural infirmities that obstruct the work; such as, our natural indolence and inattention—our accidental disabilities, arising from the temporary interpositions of pleasure—not to mention the necessary demands of unnecessary luxury—the whimsical impediments of caprice and prejudice—and, above all, the suggestions of avarice, which too often steals upon us, under the specious garb of prudence.—I say, considering these natural infirmities (which, in some degree, cleave to the soundest minds, and obstruct benevolence) there are few, perhaps, who, in a serious retrospect into their account of what good they have done, and what they might have done, will not feel more reason for humility than pride in the survey. The benevolent man, indeed, always feels pleasure from reflecting on his conduct; but the more benevolent the heart is, the more delicate it is; and the better pleased a man is with the opportunities he has employed for doing good, the more will he regret those which he has omitted. A sensation, which

will

will lead those who feel it, into a modest opinion of their benevolence, and a studious desire of improving it.

It is true, men's abilities may fall short of their disposition, in doing good to others; and, wherever they do, the disposition alone will have its full merit with God, who sees the heart; and, where his own dispensations have shortened the hand, will not expect to reap where he hath not sown. God does not demand our beneficence beyond our power, or at the expence of other duties, where he plainly enough sets before us the proper objects on which he would have us employ our beneficence; a neglect of which objects, in pursuit of others, however specious it may be in the eye of the world, is disobedience to God's appointments—loses the favour of virtue—and becomes injustice.

We cannot, indeed, see each other's hearts; and every man will claim a right of judging for himself what are his abilities, and where they shall be directed; so that the plea of disposition, but want of ability, may be much abused—and we cannot help it:—only we should take care, that the difficulty others have in judging us on this point does not betray us into a partiality in judging ourselves; because,

cause, however incompetent the judgment of the world may be, still it is a judgment we cannot avoid; and there is besides a higher, unerring, judgment in heaven, by which we must abide.

It is the greatest blessing belonging to the external powers of men, when they are *able* to do good to others; and it is the greatest blessing belonging to their internal qualities, when they are *willing* to do it: and nothing mars these blessings so much as pride, which shortens both our abilities and dispositions in serving others, by too much gratifying ourselves, and by being so intent on our own happiness, that we have no eye, except a jealous one, on the happiness of others. Pride destroys that sensibility of temper from whence benevolence arises; and though, by so doing, it protects us from many uneasinesses which the benevolent man feels, yet it makes us lose the benevolent man's pleasure, which is far more noble than the richest pleasures of pride—the godlike pleasure of making happiness.

It should encourage our attention to this amiable duty, to reflect, not only on the authority, but on the example, of Him who hath enjoined it. The act of Christ, in lov-
ing

ing and saving mankind, is shewn us, not merely to raise our wonder, which it cannot fail exciting—or to raise our adoration, which we cannot refuse to yield him; but, after shewing us where we are to seek our *salvation*, it points where we are to direct our *love*—to *Him* who hath saved us, and to *those* whom he hath saved; the latter being the most natural expression, as well as most significant testimony, of the former; for we cannot better testify our love for a friend, whose eminence sets him above the reach of our services, than by loving and serving those whom he loves; and Christ hath expressly given his judgment on the point, when he declared—“ Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye shew” love and regard “ to these my little ones, ye shew “ it unto me.”

Christ's religion is adapted to our nature and condition; he came to save sinners, and to teach social creatures; to bring them that help from heaven which they all wanted, and to encourage them in affording that help, which they are qualified to give one another. Hence arises domestic love, and hence arises a love of our country—a virtue more boasted of than found, and not always to be boasted of when found: most instances of what is called patriotism,

patriotism, when traced up to their principles, are but selfish projects; either to serve men's own interests, or to please their vanity or their passions;—and, when traced through their operations down to their consequences, are as often mischievous as they are useful.

Even policy is only useful to a state, when, proceeding from right principles, it works with honest means to good ends; all which, considering the hearts of men, and the objects around them, are rather to be wished for than depended on. As to valour, it is, like the sword it brandishes, but an instrument—of protection, in the hand of a wise man, of destruction, in the hand of a mad one. In short, policy is intricate, and valour is full of mischief; and both, perhaps, have ruined as many states as they have saved.—The plainest and surest way of shewing our love to our country is, to “love one another;” by studying, not so much to please as to profit one another, not merely by gratifying the affections, but by improving the principles, of those about us, and connecting the good of individuals with the good of the public: it is then we best shew our love to our country, when we study to make each other wiser and better men. In our present social condition,
the

the happiness of individuals depends on the welfare of the community, and the welfare of the community depends on the right conduct of the individuals; the better care therefore is taken of the latter, the better we secure the former; and that care is best taken which is taken earliest, and which works with the assistance of religion.—That an early education is a necessary provision for the future good conduct of life—and, that a good conduct in life is best secured by religion, which, at the same time, is the best security of a state—are points which do not require proof, however they may admit illustration. It is true, they are not infallible means for coming at the end proposed, as no means are, which depend on human conduct; yet common wisdom applies them as probable, though not certain.—It is much too true, that the poor in general do not behave answerably to the early and religious education they have had in charity-schools; and, perhaps, one great cause of this lies where we the least care to look for it—I mean, among ourselves; for it is to no purpose that a religious education has disposed children for a sober course of life, if, as soon as they are taken into domestic service, they meet with examples that overthrow the good they have received

received in their education. But place the bad behaviour of the poor wholly to their own account, this is no reason against the religious manner of their education, any more than it is a reason against religion itself, that it does not always secure the right conduct of men in the upper parts of life; if many of the poor are *not* the better for these charity-schools, still it is to be hoped that many *are* the better for them; as, in higher life, if many suffer their worldly affections to get the ascendant over their religion, still it is true that many, I hope more, have their conduct directed and secured by it.

Some, indeed, pretend to say, that virtue and honesty need no direction or security from religion.—They say so who have no religion, and would gladly excuse their own want of it; but, take such men where they are not concerned to excuse their own conduct, but are obliged to depend on the conduct of others, and we find them, not only anxious for having virtuous and honest men to deal with, but better satisfied with that virtue and honesty, which is supported on principles of religion, than with that which is not so supported. In short, these men of morals, however they may set themselves up in speculation

eulation against the use of religion, plainly shew, that they do not so much think religion useless, as troublesome; and that they care not how much others have of it, provided they may be allowed to have none.

Speculative minds, it is true, may gather instruction among the abstract notions of morality; but experience shews us, that common minds, in the common business of life, must feel something more solid on which they must set their practice of virtue; and that the hopes and fears which religion sets before them, the Christian religion especially, are the great security of duty among mankind. The earlier these are laid upon the mind, the deeper impression they make; and, though afterwards the cares or the vices of the world may overspread them, yet there they are; and, when reflection at any time removes the rubbish that covers them, they will be legible.—A great advantage this from a pious education — that it either keeps us good, or, if we deviate, makes our return more easy. Highly commendable, then, are they, who are careful to set so advantageous a blessing before those, who, but for such care, must go without it—must set forth in life void of that guidance on their minds, which is so necessary to carry them with safety through it;
under

288 *The Obligations to Benevolence.* Sermon. 99.

under a want of which, they will hardly escape being mischievous and miserable; and which, if well attended to, will hardly fail making them both good and useful—useful here, and happy hereafter.

SERMON

S E R M O N C.

O B E D I E N C E O U R B E S T S E C U R I T Y :
A T H A N K S G I V I N G S E R M O N , F O R
P E A C E .

I S A I A H i. 19, 20.

*If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the
good of the land :*

*But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured
with the sword: for the mouth of the Lord
hath spoken it.*

TH E Prophet, in this chapter, recounts the heavy distresses which the Jews had lately suffered from their enemies; and reminds them, that their own disobedient behaviour against God had been the cause which brought those distresses upon them. Thus, at the 4th verse, he describes them to be “ a sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil-doers, children that

VOL. III.

U

“ are

“ are corrupters ; they have forsaken the
 “ Lord, they have provoked the holy One of
 “ Israel to anger.” With this description of
 the people’s offences, he immediately connects
 the description of their country’s troubles,
 intimating, that the one was the necessary
 consequence of the other :—“ Your country
 “ is desolate, your cities are burnt with fire,
 “ your land, strangers devour it in your pre-
 “ sence, and it is desolate as overthrown by
 “ strangers.” Ver. 7.

There is nothing more remarkable through
 the whole history of the Jews, than the close
 connection between their disobedience and
 God’s punishments, their obedience and his
 blessings. God gave them frequent notice of
 his purposes in assisting or distressing them,
 according as their behaviour deserved ; and
 the event shews the actual execution of those
 purposes ; for, as he had placed them within
 the reach of several powerful nations, whom
 he employed as his instruments ; so, whilst
 they fought the Lord, God made them to
 prosper ;—they enjoyed the good of their own
 land, and fought with success against their ene-
 mies : but we no sooner read of a relapse in-
 to idolatry and a corrupt behaviour, than a
 mighty host, from some quarter or other, is
 immediately

immediately let loose upon them, and they are delivered up to be smitten, and carried away captive.

This circumstance, in the history of the Jews, supplies us with this obvious and useful lesson—that the regular and religious behaviour of a people is the best security of national blessings.

This the Jews found, by experience, to be true; and therefore it is reasonable to conclude, that we shall find it so too. For, though the case of the Jewish nation was in many particulars different from that of all other nations in the world, yet was it not so totally different as to afford no matter of instruction, by way of example to others. God, it is true, distinguished them from other people, and condescended to put himself at the head of their polity: but though, in consequence of this, he was peculiarly their king, yet still he was not only their God, but the God of all other nations. Nor is there any reason to conclude, because, as their king, he distinguished them by an administration in some respects different from others, that therefore other nations had nothing in common with them, under his general administration as God. The conduct we are speaking of, in punishing

or rewarding the Jews by national judgments, as he saw fit, was not confined to that people only; sacred history shews us, that other nations were treated in the same manner.

It is allowable then for us to take example from the Jews; and to apply the general methods of God's government, by which he conducted that people, as suitable rules for our behaviour; and, as we find that their obedience to God was always the best title to his blessings, as well as the best security of them, we have reason to conclude, that our obedience will be attended with the same success, and entitle us to a continuance of the blessings he vouchsafes us; and consequently, that, as God has been pleased to remove from us the calamities of war, and bless us with the return of peace, it is not only our duty to be thankful for this blessing, but our thanks will be best expressed, and the blessing best secured to us, by a future obedience to his laws; the want of which has called down the late distresses for our correction—which may be only suspended to give us leisure for amendment, and which will fall with heavier weight if we neglect it.

When God dispenses his blessings on a nation, he does it, not merely to make it a rich,

rich, a powerful, or a glorious nation; but to answer the general purposes of his Providence. Such, indeed, as will not allow Providence to interpose in the government of mankind, may reject the notion of any such purposes; and, as they look no farther than themselves for the production of human events, will naturally look no farther for the use and application of them: but if the disposition of human events be in the hand of Providence, it is reasonable to admit that all his dispensations are directed to some wise purposes; and that, as he dispenses private blessings, not solely for the benefit of the particular person on whom they are conferred, but for the benefit of others, so he dispenses his public blessings with the like view, not merely to favour the nation on which they are conferred, but with a view to other more extensive purposes in his general government of mankind. In this light we see the necessary obligation we are under of making a proper application of God's blessings; as, without it, we not only are ungrateful to his goodness, but rebellious against his wisdom, and defeat his purposes, at the same time that we despise his gifts.

If, then, the proper application of God's blessings be of this importance, I would observe, that the religious disposition of a people is the most natural step for promoting it.

A religious disposition not only sends us to God, with thanks for his benefits, and thereby bespeaks his favour, as it shews our gratitude; but it prompts us to ask his assistance in applying them to the purposes for which he has intended them—and so bespeaks his favour, as it shews our willingness to serve him. If the blessings we enjoy are sent us to be used, it is certainly prudent to ask assistance in the use of them; and, of whom can we better ask assistance, than of him who gave them? It is a sort of shameless ingratitude and contempt, which men are not ordinarily guilty of toward each other, to forget or abuse the benefits they have received, before their benefactor's face; and, so long as religion keeps us in the presence of God, we shall be less apt to forget from whom we have received them; and, so long as we remember from whom we have received them, we shall be better disposed to apply them to the purpose which he intends. On the contrary,
by

by a neglect of a religious disposition, we easily forget to whom we owe our blessings, and to what purpose they are given; and, by looking upon them as our own, our passions easily beguile us of them for their use; and, whilst our virtues are idly starving for want of that which was intended for their support and employment, our vices gather strength, and, fattening in the spoil they have got, will soon grow mischievous and unruly.

Thus a neglect of religion naturally introduces a debauchery of morals: and what wonder? since, as religion is the only sure foundation of morality, the loss of the former must draw with it the destruction of the other. The philosopher, in his study, may amuse himself with separating religion from morality, and placing each upon distinct principles; but, if he persuades himself that there is no real connection between them, he is mistaken. Let him shut up his book, and step into the world. He will see, that in real practice, religion is as naturally productive of morality as any cause is productive of its suitable effect; and that, in proportion as men neglect the former, they will be deficient in the latter. This is true in fact; and (was

the world so young that it did not yet produce a fact) reason shews us that it must be so. For, on what principle of morality can my neighbour, or my country, build their expectations of my duty, when I have been daring and strong enough to break through the principle on which my God expected it? He who can deny there is a God, cannot be depended upon for his consent to the plainest proposition in morality; and he who believes there is a God, yet ventures to despise him, cannot be afraid to refuse what his neighbour or his country may demand of him, any farther than his neighbour or his country may have it in their power to oblige him, upon a principle of fear, rather than of morality.

And, when a neglect of religion has thus introduced a debauchery of morals, what can we expect but a vicious abuse of those blessings which God has put into our hands? For, what other direction or inducement can we feel for applying them right, when we have ventured to neglect his direction, who not only gave them, but has power to recall them? When the principle of gratitude is gone, and we are no longer afraid of losing what we have, upon a misuse of it, there is,

at

at best, but a chance of using it right: and, when this comes to be the general practice of a nation, that the blessings bestowed upon it are ungratefully and contemptuously applied, is it too much for God to resent it? or, is it not as natural for him to withdraw them, in consequence of his anger, as it is natural for us to deprive a servant of his trust, in consequence of our anger, upon his unthriftiness?

To apply what has been offered.

This nation has often experienced the changes of prosperity and distress. Whether we chuse to allow Providence any share in the disposal of these national events, or, whether we look upon them as the mere effect of human conduct, I will not pretend to say: but this I will venture to say, that, as there is nothing in the doctrine of a governing Providence, of which the wisest or the freest nation need be ashamed, so those who reject it, have more reason to fear, than they have to disprove it. Let me add farther, that, whatever becomes of the arguments by which we usually support the doctrine of a governing Providence, this is very certain, that a people, who are influenced by such a persuasion, will behave better than those who are not.

Instead

Instead of diminishing the merit of national successes, it will heighten their value, to look upon them as marks of God's favour and approbation, and will encourage ingenuous tempers to go on to deserve them. And, if it aggravates our distresses to consider them as tokens of the Divine displeasure, it furnishes us, at the same time, with instructions for the removal of them. When we consider our distresses as the mere consequence of human weakness and defect of wisdom, we know not how to remove the former, because we know not how to cure the latter; but, when we consider them as the effect of God's anger for our sins, we have hopes of getting from them, because we have easy means before us of averting that anger which has laid them upon us. In short, when we are confident of a sufficient power above us, from whence we may expect good or evil, according to our deserts, we feel a more reasonable ground for our hopes and fears, and consequently a stronger motive and better rule of conduct, than when we look upon them as the disposal of chance, or (which is still as unsatisfactory) as the mere effect of human conduct. In this view, we shall of-

†

tender

tener disregard them as they *may not* happen, than make them a rule of our behaviour, because they *may*.

We are now met to pay our acknowledgments to God for a late national event, in laying aside the fatigues of war, for the enjoyment of peace; and the appointment of this day's solemnity upon the occasion shews, we have so much religion left among us, as to impute to God's Providence, what we think a national blessing: but, whether we have enough religion left to make a right use of the blessing, is a more important, and, I wish I could not add, a more doubtful question. I will not dwell upon a disagreeable subject at this season of joy and thanksgiving; but, as a due sense of our own unworthiness is a strong contrast to shew the goodness of God, as well as the best step towards making a right use of it, it may be proper to consider seriously, what merit England has to plead from the religious or moral behaviour of its people; and, whether we have not reason to blush at being favoured with a national blessing, and as much reason to tremble, lest we should make it prove a curse to us. I am afraid there are but few, who will rightly pay that religious observance, even of this day's duty,

duty, which properly belongs to it; who will seriously turn their thoughts to those subjects, which it is intended to suggest to them, and will, with true devotion, acknowledge their deliverance from distress, and with as true sincerity resolve to deserve the mercies they are celebrating. The novelty of the occasion, rather than the importance of it, is the principle on which this day's worship is chiefly built; for, as there are few who think themselves enough concerned in a national misbehaviour to charge any of the guilt to their own account, so they may think themselves too little concerned in a national blessing, to be zealous in their thanks for it. But there are fewer still who will not think (at least behave as if they thought) their whole duty paid in their attendance upon this day's worship. How few instances of reformation shall we meet with after it! how few, who, though they have acknowledged the justice of national punishments for the sins that are found in it, will yet be solicitous to remove their share of them out of the way! And yet, if this is not done, at least, if it is not so much as thought of, the solemn worship we are now engaged in, is no better than a prostitution of religious duty,

and a mockery of God ; and we have reason to apply to ourselves what the Prophet said to the Jews—" To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? When ye spread forth your hands I will hide mine eyes from you ; yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear you. Wash ye, make you clean : cease to do evil ; learn to do good."

If the blessings of peace be worth our thanks, they are worth preserving. We see the terms on which the preservation of them is proposed ; and must therefore conclude, that, as our gratitude calls us to thank God for them, so our interest calls us to obey him. The blessings of peace are many and various ; as many and as various as are the natural wants of mankind, encreased by the additional distresses of a war : different stations may reap different advantages from this change ; but there is one advantage superior to all the rest, and which is dispersed through every station ; I mean, the advantage of enjoying and cultivating a pure religion. Who values religion according to its worth, will value every opportunity which is given him of enjoying it : and when the hand of Providence has restrained the fury of our enemies,

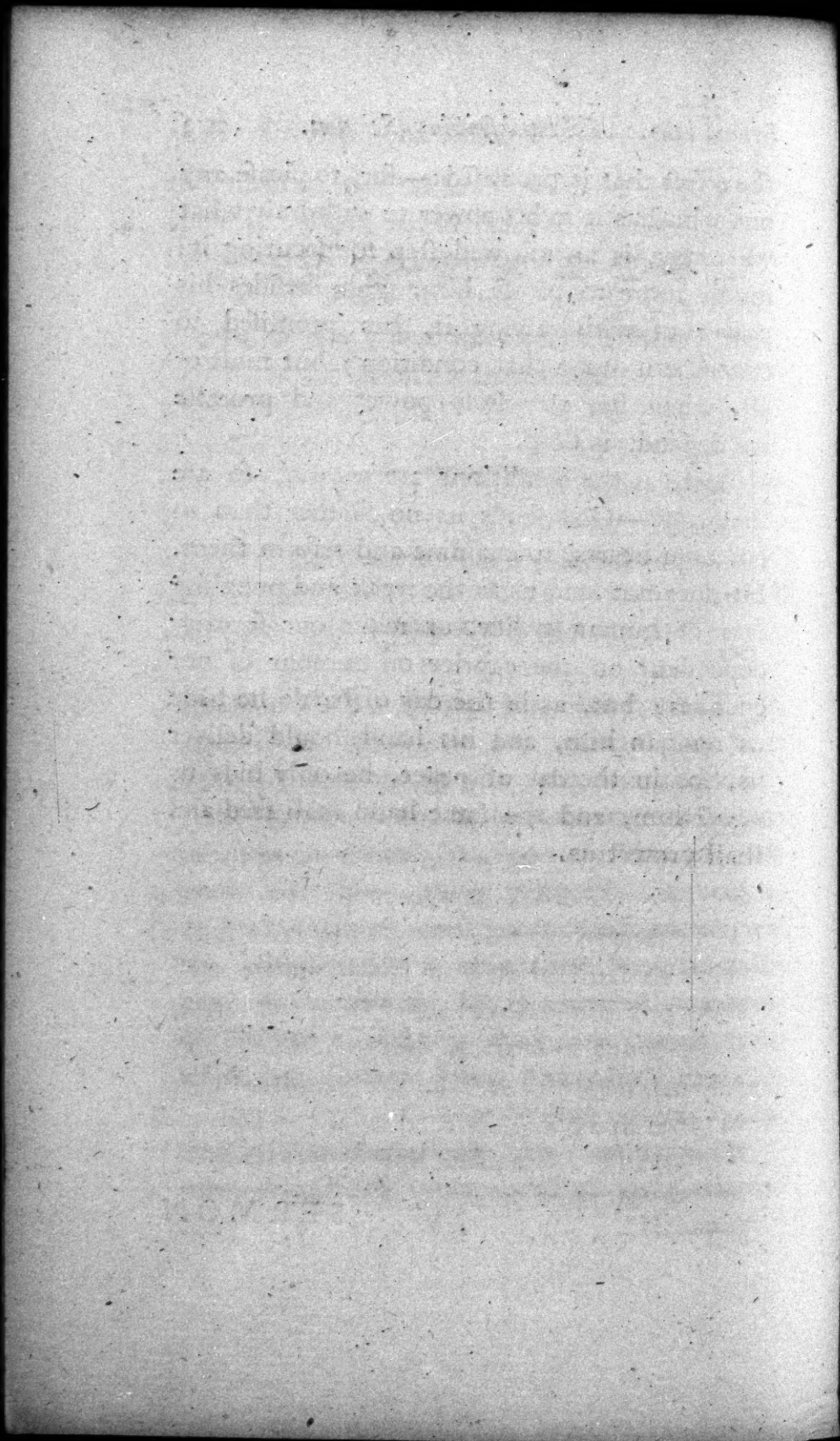
and

and silenced the noise of war, he will look upon it as the peculiar advantage attending the peaceful condition of a nation, that religion is at liberty to instil her dictates into the ear of man, and his heart at liberty to pay a free attention to them, undisturbed by those fears which had called it from looking after his interest in another world, in order to provide for his safety in this. With this disposition, the exercise of religion will be a welcome change of care, and a regular behaviour the infallible effects of it. With this disposition, he will build his regard for social duties upon its surest principle, and will endeavour to recommend himself to the love of his fellow-creatures, because it is a means of recommending himself to the love of God: and thus he will contribute his share in laying a foundation for the continuance of peace, by doing what lays in his power to make us acceptable to that God on whose favour it depends.

To conclude:—The best method of celebrating the praises due to God for the blessings of this day, is, seriously to think upon the conditions on which their continuance is promised—"If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land."—The performance of these conditions is a natural step to
the

the effect that is promised:—for, to please any one who has it in his power to withdraw what we enjoy, is an allowed step for securing it; much more to please him, who, besides his power of withdrawing it, has promised to continue it upon that condition; but most of all, when he, on whose power and promise we depend, is God.

And, as the conditions are *natural*, so are they *easy*.—God sends us no farther than to our own hearts, to examine and reform them. He does not send us to the weak and puzzling arts of human policy, or make our security dependant on the caprice or humour of our enemies; but, as in the day of battle he bade us *trust* in him, and his hand should deliver us, so, in the day of peace, he only bids us *please* him, and the same hand shall feed and shall protect us.



S E R M O N C I.

ST. PAUL'S ARGUMENT AGAINST
FORNICATION.

I CORINTHIANS vi. 18.

Flee Fornication.

ST. Paul sends this advice to the Christians at Corinth, the metropolis of Greece. This eminent city was grown very rich and populous by trade, and, in consequence of that, was become luxurious and expensive, even to a proverb. Pleasure, gaiety, and taste, were so predominant among them, and pursued at so much cost, that men of sober spirits and moderate fortunes could not venture to come near them; and such principally flocked to Corinth, who had much wealth and little care what became of it.

This opulent, gay, and expensive city was wholly given to debauchery. Prostitutes were

not only numerous but in high estimation among them. Among the great variety of fictitious deities in use among the Greeks, Venus was the great deity of the Corinthians: for, in those times, men chose their deities as their vices directed them, and worshipped those most who patronized what they themselves liked best. Thus the Corinthians chose Venus for their deity; and lust, being the darling practice of the place, naturally became the religion of it. After which, it is no wonder to find such as were called Philosophers among them, adapting their doctrine to what was not only the humour, but the devotion, of the people they lived with; and permitting, if not defending, the gross and impure pleasures which they saw they were so fond of. The grave Stoics, as well as the licentious Epicureans, joined in the fashionable doctrine—that appetites were given to be gratified; and when, by this indulgence, they had licensed some gratifications, they could not stop to forbid any, the most abominable. How could they? The doctrine which allows men to do *some things*, because they have a mind to it, necessarily allows them to do *any thing*, if they have a mind to it: and, if the mere call of appetite justifies the indulgence

indulgence of it, the worst indulgences may be the best justified, as the call may be the strongest: at least, no indulgences can be condemned; for no man indulges himself in what he has no mind to do. This fashionable doctrine did, in fact, work its whole effect among the Corinthians; who were totally addicted, not only to *some*, but to *all*, even the grossest and most abominable impurities.

Among these Corinthians, St. Paul had lately planted Christianity; and now, it seems, he thought it necessary to write to them; to correct some enormities that were gathering strength among them.

These Corinthian Christians were run much into parties: some following one preacher, and some another; each party extolling its own preacher, to the disparagement of all the rest. This was no fit temper for a Christian church; though it was a very natural one for a Corinthian church: for, in populous cities, where luxury and pleasure govern the hearts of a people, pride and vanity will govern their judgment; and they infallibly produce diversity of opinion, as in all other matters, so in matters of religion.

But this was not all the Apostle had to say to his Corinthians. — “It is reported com-

“ monly (says he) that there is fornication
“ among you :” which had been better translated—‘Fornication is universally found among
‘ you.’

This, too, was very unchristian, but very Corinthian. Many, it seems, of these converts, though they had taken up a new religion, had not, however, laid down their old practices : and, though they had turned their backs on the shrine of Venus, were yet too much at her devotion. Inveterate habits of vice do not at once yield to better discipline ; and the Corinthians, like the rest of the Heathen world, were very loth to be persuaded that fornication was a sin.

Yet the Apostle ventures to set before them both the danger and the sin of it. And, as it must be owned, that the authority of an Apostle was necessary on this occasion, to stand up against the general, darling vice of a gay, licentious, and debauched city ; so it may be worth while to see what were the arguments of an Apostle on this occasion ; and to hear what so great a man as St. Paul was, had to say to his Corinthians against fornication.

I. First, then, he tells them very plainly
—“ Be not deceived : neither fornicators, nor
“ idolaters,

“ idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate,
“ nor abusers of themselves with mankind,
“ shall inherit the kingdom of God.”—Bad
news for such among them as gave themselves
up to fornication, and yet believed there was
a kingdom of God, and were desirous of go-
ing thither. For, what was to be done ?
There was no room for the Corinthians to
doubt the authority of this declaration, which
the Apostle gave them by commission and
direction from Christ ; and to as little pur-
pose would it have been for them to have
reasoned or remonstrated against the severity
of it. For what would it have signified to
have told the Apostle—that it was a very
hard thing to be shut out of the kingdom of
God for such a matter : a matter so venial,
nay, even necessary ; so generally practised,
and practised in the best company. — What
then ? the Apostle “ preached not himself, but
“ Christ Jesus the Lord.”—He “ preached no
“ other commandment than what he had re-
“ ceived,” which, as he had no authority to
make, so he had no authority to *alter*. They
might think fornication to be venial, or even
necessary ; but if Christ did not think it so,
what could the Apostle do ? They might
esteem it no disparagement, or might think

it a fashionable qualification for the politest company; but if Christ did not think fit to open his kingdom to such polite company, who could help it, or who could complain? We must, surely, allow Christ as much privilege in his own kingdom as we use in our own houses; and, if we are careful to shut out company we do not like, surely so may Christ; who doubtless has as much right to say, that fornicators shall not sit down in his company, as we have to say they shall be welcome to ours.

This declaration, then, of the Apostle pinned his Corinthians down in this dilemma; that they must either give up fornication or the kingdom of heaven; unless they could prevail upon Christ to reverse his declaration; for St. Paul had not authority to do it. His business was to deliver the commands of Christ, not to traffic with them, by lowering them upon any considerations that might be offered. In short, he plainly delivered to them this declaration — that no fornicator should be admitted into Christ's kingdom: and, without waiting for their remonstrance, left them to determine which they would chuse—the fashionable and filthy pleasures of the town, or, the happiness of heaven.

II. The

II. The Apostle, in the next verse, sets before his Corinthians another topic of consideration :—" Ye are washed, ye are sanctified, ye are justified in the name of our Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."

These Corinthian fornicators were called, and professed themselves to be, Christians : and the meaning of this argument, which the Apostle brings against fornication is — that it is unbecoming, and inconsistent with, the profession and duty of a Christian.

He points out to them three material circumstances in their profession, which, as Christians, they would not care to disown, and which yet, as being fornicators, they could not claim to any purpose. They had renounced all the lusts of the flesh in their baptism—" Ye are washed." They were entitled to the assistance of God's Spirit in their hearts, upon being fitly disposed to receive it—" Ye are sanctified by the Spirit of our God." And, they were entitled to be accepted as just, through the merits of Christ, upon their sincere endeavours to obey his commands—" Ye are justified in the name of our Lord Jesus." All this they professed and hoped for as Christians ; and yet all this they made frustrate by their fornication,

tion. By the practice of which they indulged those lusts of the flesh which they had renounced;—they disqualified themselves for the influence of God's pure Spirit in their hearts, by their impure thoughts and purposes;—and they disqualified themselves for Christ's acceptance, by their impure practices and wilful disobedience to his express commands.

What, now, was to be done? Could the Corinthian Christians deny these important circumstances of their profession? or, Could they affirm, that the practice of fornication was consistent with them;—that indulging their lusts was consistent with renouncing them;—that filling the heart with impure thoughts was consistent with preparing it for the Spirit of God;—and that wilful disobedience to Christ was consistent with a title to his favour and acceptance? If they could not affirm these things to be consistent, they must allow, that fornication was inconsistent with the profession and duty of a Christian; and if so, they could not deny it to be a sin.

What could the Corinthians say to this? that these were hard terms?—Nay, but they were the terms which Christ, not St. Paul, had set them: they were the terms on which themselves had undertaken and professed to
serve

serve him. So that here again the Apostle reduces his Corinthians to another dreadful dilemma: his former plain declaration—that fornication is inconsistent with their hopes of God's kingdom, left them under a necessity of giving up either the pleasures of Corinth or the happiness of heaven: and now, as plain a declaration, that it is inconsistent with the duty of a Christian, leaves them under a necessity either of renouncing Christ or giving up fornication.

III. The next argument which the Apostle produces against fornication, seems to be laid down as an answer to a plea, then commonly used in favour of it. They had a set of men among them, very cunning but very lewd teachers (Gnostics they were called) who, pretending to be more knowing than they really were, seduced others to be more wicked than they would have been. These men insinuated—that fornication was a natural appetite, and that it was as lawful to gratify it, as to gratify the appetite of hunger or thirst.

To this St. Paul puts in his answer of caution: “All things are lawful unto me, but
“all things are not expedient: all things are

“ lawful for me, but I will not be brought
“ under the power of any. Meats for the
“ belly, and the belly for meats; but God
“ shall destroy both it and them. Now, the
“ body is not for fornication, but for the
“ Lord, and the Lord for the body.”

In this argument the Apostle tells them,

1. That, supposing fornication not to be strictly unlawful, yet that is not sufficient to excuse the practice of it. There are many actions of an indifferent nature, with respect to the general law of moral good and evil, which yet will fall under the particular rules of discretion and expediency. And a Christian, by the purity of his profession, is strictly bound to direct his conduct, not only according to what is lawful, but according to what is proper; and he ought to be particularly careful to avoid such actions, however indifferent in themselves, which may be prejudicial in their consequences; and which, supposing them not to be sins, may however lead to what are so; may weaken and defile the heart; and, by degrees, may betray it under the slavish dominion of sensual pleasures.— But the Apostle, in this argument, farther tells them,

2. That

2. That fornication not only may be improper, supposing it to be indifferent, but that it really was not such an indifferent matter as they seemed to think it.

The instance that is brought from the natural appetite of hunger, will not serve to justify fornication, as if one might be as lawfully gratified as the other. "For," says the Apostle, "meats are for the belly, and the belly for meats :—but the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body."—"Meat is intended for the food of the body, and the organs of the body are accordingly fitted for receiving and disposing of this food : but this is only a temporary provision for the sustenance of the body in this life, and will be laid aside in the next. But the use of the body is quite a different thing from the use of food : we use our food for the sustenance of our bodies ; but we should use our bodies for the glory and service of God. Food is intended only for this life, and the use of it is wholly confined to the present condition of our being ; but our bodies are intended for a higher scene of things, and the use of them should be principally directed to what they are principally intended for, which is not merely our own, but God's service ;

service; not the pleasures of this world, but the glories of another. It does not follow, then, that because we may eat as we have a mind, therefore we may use our bodies as we have a mind. On the contrary, as we use our food according to the natural connection there is in this life between that and the body, so we should use our bodies according to the connection which there is in this life, and will be in another, between them and God, who made them for his glory and service."

IV. In the next verse, the Apostle pursues this topic, and carries it up to such an argument which his Corinthians could not set aside, without disowning their religion, and renouncing Christ:—"God hath both raised
" up the Lord, and will also raise up us by
" his own power; (and) know ye not that
" your bodies are the members of Christ?
" shall I then take the members of Christ
" and make them the members of an harlot?
" God forbid."

That our bodies are intended for another and far more glorious state, was what the Apostle just now assigned as a reason why the use of them should not be confined to the pleasures of this state, but should be directed
to

to such duties and services as might qualify us for a better. He now confirms this point, by assuring them, that, as God had already raised up the body of Christ from the grave to a seat in heaven, so, in like manner, and to the same purpose, he would certainly raise up ours. "If then (says the Apostle to his Corinthians) such is to be the future condition of your bodies, what, think ye, ought to be your present use and regard for them? If ye are to have your bodies raised with Christ, and seated with his body in his kingdom of glory, ought ye not to preserve them undefiled, and fit for such advancement? If ye now belong to Christ, if hereafter ye shall be united with Christ, as members with their head, can you think it allowable to throw such great dishonour, both on Christ and on your own bodies, as to run into the embraces of an harlot, called as you are, and intended for, the embraces of Christ?"

The gay Corinthians, it is more than likely, were not before aware of so weighty a consideration upon this matter. Their thoughts were so wholly taken up in adapting themselves for their polite parties of pleasure, that they never once thought of adapting themselves for the company of Christ in heaven;
and,

and, whilst they were ridiculously anxious and vain of appearing well-dressed for each other's admiration, never regarded with what dirty and defiled bodies they approached the kingdom of Christ.

V. And perhaps as little were they aware of another no less weighty consideration in this matter. The Apostle having surprized them with the former question—"Know ye not, that you bodies are the members of Christ?" surprizes them with another—"Know ye not, that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in you?" The Corinthians, though they were so much addicted to sensual pleasures, that they might not be well aware of this important circumstance belonging to their Christian profession, yet were not so profligate as to despise it, when they had it thus urged to them by the Apostle.—The assistance of God's Spirit in the hearts of Christians, directing and animating their thoughts to good purposes, is a privilege as surely and as plainly promised in the gospel, as any other privilege which Christ hath derived to us; and the Corinthians, if they were persuaded of this, as they must be if they were Christians, must pause upon this question of the Apostle's, and find themselves

under some difficulty how to answer it; for they must be sensible, that nothing can be more opposite or averse, than the impure thoughts of the flesh, and the pure motions of God's Holy Spirit; so that they cannot both have dominion in the same heart: therefore, whilst they felt their hearts full of fornication, they must feel them empty of God's Spirit; and consequently must feel themselves deprived of one great privilege belonging to them as Christians; and, if deprived of one, why not of more? since nothing disqualifies for one grace, which will not disqualify for all; and, when once they had driven the Spirit of God from his temple in their hearts, they had so far debarred themselves from entering into his kingdom in heaven.

The Apostle, therefore, might well content himself with barely putting this important question to his Corinthians, and leaving them to their own thoughts for an answer to it; since, if they thought like Christians, they must immediately conclude, that, if their body be the temple of God's Spirit, it became them to keep it fit for such residence;—that impure thoughts and purposes could be no suitable companions for such a guest;—that
fornication,

fornication, therefore, must needs be odious to him ; and, consequently, that if they followed fornication, they must be deserted by the Spirit of God, whose temple in their hearts was become too filthy for his residence ;—and might well fear, that the temple in their hearts, which the Spirit of God had left, would be seized and possessed by the Spirit of the devil.

The Apostle throws into this argument an observation too material to be omitted :—
“ Every sin that a man doth” (that is, most other sins which are committed) “ is without
“ the body” (that is, are committed either against God or our neighbour); “ but he that
“ committeth fornication, sinneth against his
“ own body” (that is, sinneth against himself.)—I doubt not but many a gay Corinthian found, to his cost, that he hurt himself by fornication ; but there might be need of an Apostle's hint to shew him, that he sinned against himself. They might not think so nicely, as to distinguish, that the same individual person might be at once the offender, and the object against which the offence is committed; or, if they did think so far, *Ego met mi ignosco* would satisfy them. But the argument the
Apostle

Apostle is upon, that we are the temple of God's Spirit, shews, that a man owes not only a care, but a reverence, to himself; by a neglect of which, he not only might *hurt*, but actually *sinned against* himself, (that is) treated himself with less reverence and care than (considering what he is) was due to himself. This observation of the Apostle's was pertinently urged, to a sort of men whose vanity and licentiousness would naturally lead them to value themselves, if they valued nothing else: but it derives its whole force from the argument he is upon, that the reverence due to ourselves is a reverence of God's ordaining, by sending his Holy Spirit into our hearts; and consequently, the sin of fornication becomes a sin against ourselves, by its being a sin against God.

VI. The Apostle's last argument against fornication is this; which, though the last, is the foundation of all the rest—"Ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price." As he was writing to Christians, it was needless to say whose they were, or, with how great a price they were bought. No serious Christian can forget it: nor could any of St. Paul's Corinthians seriously think, after Christ had laid down the price of his own blood to purchase

chase both their bodies and souls from sin, that they were at liberty to sin with either or with both of them as they thought fit. They could not seriously think, after Christ had laid down so great a price to “purchase unto himself a people zealous of good works,” that such a people were at liberty to pursue what vicious works they please; upon no better pretence too, than because they have a call of appetite so to do, (that is) in plain truth, because they have a mind to it. In short, they could not think (if they thought at all) after Christ had laid down so great a price to purchase for them a mansion in heaven, where both their bodies and souls might be received in glory—that they had nothing to do, to prepare them *both* for such a consummation: much less could they think, that souls habituated to impurity, and bodies worn out by debauchery, could be fit to be called up to the mansions of heaven, or to be returned into his hands, who shed his blood to wash them, and to have them restored pure and undefiled to his kingdom.

Such were the Apostle's arguments against fornication, which he sent to his Corinthians: who were very loth to be persuaded that fornication was a sin; though they had no better reason

reason for proving it allowable, than that they liked it. But St. Paul well knew, that, as there were no arguments in favour of vice but what were weak ones, so the weakest arguments, when they fall in with the inclinations, will descend too deep to be easily removed. He therefore applies himself, with apostolic strength, to conquer their vicious prejudice in this point, and tells them, in the way of authoritative declaration from Christ, whose commission he bore—That, whatever they might think of fornication, Christ pronounced it a sin;—that it was absolutely inconsistent with their hopes of heaven, and contradictory to their profession and duty as Christians;—that their bodies are principally intended for the service of God here, and the glories of heaven hereafter; and therefore ought not to be debased to the slavish and filthy pleasure of this life;—that their bodies are the members of Christ, and therefore ought not to be dishonoured;—that they are the temple of God's Spirit, and therefore ought not to be defiled:—in short, that they are Christ's, and not their own, and therefore they ought not to abuse, by fornication, what is not their own; but “to glorify

“ God, both in their body and in their spirit,
“ which are God’s.”

I shall only add, that the Corinthians, to whom St. Paul wrote this epistle, were not brought up from their infancy under a national establishment of Christianity—they had but very lately heard of the gospel;—and, though they were a licentious, debauched, pleasure-taking people, yet they thought there was sense in what the Apostle said, and the epistle he sent them wrought a reformation among them.—And God grant, that all such who “ are admitted into the fellowship of Christ’s religion, may carefully eschew what is so contrary to their profession, and may follow all such things as are agreeable to the same!”

S E R M O N CII.

THE DUTY OF APPLYING OUR WORLD-
LY ADVANTAGES FOR THE GOOD OF
OTHERS.

L U K E xvi. 8, 9.

The Lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely : for the children of this world are, in their generation, wiser than the children of light. And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness ; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.

THE intent of this advice is to direct us so to apply our present worldly advantages, that we may make them productive of greater advantages hereafter.

The form of expression made use of in this advice, seems to confine it principally to the management of riches ; which, with great propriety, may, for many reasons, be styled, “ the

"mammon of unrighteousness," or false mammon: but, though the manner of expression be particular, the sense of the advice is general, and reaches to every worldly advantage we enjoy; the least of which, by a proper application, may be made productive of greater advantages hereafter.

This world sets before us our *work*, the next sets before us our *reward*: and all the benefits of life are entrusted with us, to be managed for the honour of God, and for our own and others' happiness.

We are every day liable to be removed from this trust; and therefore should, every day, employ it to the best advantage. If we are not always liable to be removed for mismanagement, yet the condition of our nature makes the continuance of our trust precarious.

We discharge our trust in the benefits of life, when we do all the good we are able in our respective stations.

The abilities of doing good in human life are various; nor is any man so scantily furnished with them, but he is capable of doing some good, if he be placed within reach of a proper object. It is therefore a lesson of universal extent—to be doing good.

The

The mere corporal abilities of man qualify him for this work, and we may do good by the labour of our hands.

The intellectual abilities of the mind raise us to higher offices of service, and qualify us for doing good in a more extensive manner, by the exercise of ingenuity and wisdom.

External abilities will set us at work in doing good.—Among these, what principally furnishes us with opportunities of doing good, is wealth. From hence, as from their root, arise all other external abilities in life; and even natural and intellectual abilities, though they do not spring from hence as from a root, will require it as an assistance and support.

How to make a right use of wealth, is no problem in theory; but it is somewhat hard to be reduced to practice. The temptations for abusing it encrease with the enlargement of it, and the more we have, the less we know what to do with it.

The miser makes himself a slave to that which is given him to command: he sacrifices his public virtues to get at his wealth, and his private ones to keep it. Instead of making himself friends hereafter, by the use of his mammon, he makes himself enemies, even here, by the abuse of it: for, it is an

abuse of wealth to make no use of it, as well as to make a bad one; since either method runs contrary to the true design with which it is given us.

The profligate takes the other extreme; and, as the former makes himself a slave to his wealth, so this makes his wealth a slave to his lusts and passions. The one adores what he should command, the other tyrannizes over what he should make his friend; and, by setting it upon the worst services, makes it incapable of assisting him in the best.—Both these sort of men, by abusing the means they have of making themselves respected here, and happy hereafter, live in contempt, and die without hope.

Within these two extremes, then, we must look for those who use wealth with propriety and to the best advantage. Yet the search may be more troublesome than successful.

Even in this part of mankind, licentiousness will lead great numbers to misapply the abilities they have from their wealth; who, though they have prudence enough to stop its encroachments upon their necessary substance, yet let it run away with the superfluities of it; such are ready to assume commendation in their conduct. Yet, why? Their
care

care of their necessary substance is, indeed, a discharge of one duty; and is so far commendable, as it shews a proper regard for their own and their family's welfare; but there remains another duty, of equal obligation—which is, after taking care of ourselves, to take care of others. This duty is lost in a licentious application of our abundance; which is given us for the benefit of others, and is abused when otherwise directed. It is by assisting the happiness of others, that we must promote our own; and he falls short of the point to which our Saviour's advice directs us, of making friends by this world's mammon, who only secures a present welfare, but dissipates the means by which he should secure a future one.

Besides licentiousness, *pride* exerts a great sway in the disposal of our superfluities; and this principle works with the greater effect, as it often works protected by the grave authority of worldly prudence.—Pride will stamp a necessity upon several parts of our conduct, and, under the title and authority of worldly prudence, will lead us to dispute the directions of spiritual œconomy, and to be more solicitous for carrying an imaginary importance

ance here, than for establishing a substantial interest hereafter.

Pride assumes a wider sway in the management of our superfluities, and looks farther in the disposal of them, than licentiousness does. He who is directed by licentiousness in the use of his superfluities, looks no farther than himself; but pride will look down into posterity, and direct its aim to an imaginary object of gratification. No man, I hope, is anxious for having his heirs as vicious as himself; but many are too anxious for having them as splendid. On this principle, superfluities are hoarded up for the abuse of those who are yet unborn; and, when we have already as much as becomes our station, with as much besides as our own pride can dispense with, the superfluity is still withheld from its proper use, and we turn our backs upon those opportunities for doing good with it which Providence sets before us, that we may support and feed the pride of future heirs.

As we have learnt to call this sort of conduct raising or ennobling a family, so it passes with approbation. But, where is the prudence, in resigning the means we have of doing good, into the hands of those who may neglect

neglect or misapply them? When God gives us more than we want, he always sets before us the objects to which he intends the superfluity should be directed: by a compliance with such appointment, we do God honour; we procure ourselves esteem here, and a reward hereafter. We cannot bequeath these to our heirs. We cannot transfer to them our duties, and the advantages arising from the performance of them: they are our own, and we alone are answerable for a neglect of them. It should seem therefore enough, if a man leaves his heir as full means of doing his duty as he himself has had; and a good man may well say, with respect to his heir—If he proves like me, the same estate which has supported me, will support him; and, if he proves otherwise, there is no reason that I should feed and promote his licentiousness at my expence.—It is certainly too much, when he sacrifices his own duty, and the advantages arising from it, only to put his heir in a way of neglecting his likewise.

If we look into the common event of these over-zealous provisions for future heirs, we shall hardly find it deserving the character even of worldly prudence. We see families
sink

sink faster than they rise; and, what was intended for their strength and honour, proves their shame and their destruction. It is a circumstance observable in the politic as well as the natural constitution of man, that it is made with a certain degree of strength, adapted to the services it is intended for. Both may be overloaded: and we frequently see men sinking under a weight of wealth, which their ancestors have heaped upon them, who might have carried their own acquirements with steadiness and esteem. So short-sighted is man—and so watchful is the eye and hand of Providence, he will not suffer his general blessings to be monopolized; but, when, to aggrandize a name and family, we for a while engross the substance we should dispense about us, Providence over-rules our project, withdraws us from our shining heaps, and scatters them in the next generation.

Such considerations upon the disposal of our superfluities in a wrong way, should direct us to a right method of applying them. Instead of making ourselves contemptible, if not hurtful, by consuming them upon our lusts, or to indulge our pride, we should make ourselves both useful and respected, by
 setting

setting them out for the assistance and benefit of mankind. Instead of dissipating our treasures upon earth, or laying them up only to leave a name behind us, and to feed the moth or the profligate, we had better apply them for procuring a name where we are going, whither our good deeds will fly before us, and will bespeak us an applause which shall continue, when even the gilded dirt of this perishable globe shall be dissolved.

The opportunities of doing good are distributed through human life in such variety, that it looks as if Providence would tempt men to the observance of this duty, by suiting the objects of beneficence to the different tastes, as well as to the different abilities, belonging to us. Objects of beneficence meet us in every path of human life: and there is that *propriety*, that *pleasure*, that *advantage*, in applying ourselves to this duty, as most strongly recommends it.

1. As to the *propriety* of this duty.—Since God has not set all mankind on a level, but has distinguished them one above another, in different stations, it is manifest what is the duty of man in the station in which he is placed; that he does not stand in a high one, to inter-
cept

cept the benefits of Providence from those beneath him, but to reach them down to such as stand too low to reach them for themselves. Without this use of high stations, (which the good man will make of them) they are not worth the acceptance of a wise one. He who is entrusted with honour and wealth, carries a light for the benefit of those behind him who have none; but if he does not apply it to this use, he only carries a light, to shew contempt and reproach where to strike.

2. The heart-felt *pleasure*, attending this duty, will not admit description. Those who have not tried the practice of it, would not understand it; and those who have tried it, feel more than description can set before them. The pleasure is such, that we are often hurried, in the pursuit of it, beyond the rules of prudence; and lose the apprehension of our own mischief, in our eager zeal for another's good. If, then, the pleasure in doing good be such as tempts us even to imprudence, it is certainly sufficient to persuade us to a prudent cultivation of it: for, surely, when we have looked round upon all the pleasures which this world's contents can yield, when

we have surveyed all the actions by which we can improve our own happiness, we shall find none so effectual as those which promote the happiness of others ; nor is there any thought which fills the soul with a more steady and pure delight, than that which tells us we are benefactors to mankind.

3. Then, for the *advantages* arising from a discharge of this duty, they are such as concern both this life and the next.

As to this life : besides the obvious temporal advantages which flow from the general love and esteem of mankind, a proper disposal of our worldly abilities conduces much to our moral improvement in virtue and religion. For (it is our Saviour's own observation) " he " who is faithful in that which is least, is " faithful also in much. If, therefore, ye " have not been faithful in the unrighteous " mammon, who will commit to your trust " the true riches ?" He who applies his temporal abilities properly, is not likely to misapply his spiritual ones ; and a natural step towards our improvement under the latter, is to make a good use of the former : for there is a close connection between *doing good* and *being good*. The same disposition which
leads

leads us to assist virtue in others, naturally leads us to cultivate it in ourselves; and, as every single act of beneficence fills the soul with complacency, a constant habit of it will so compose and rectify the heart, as to make it fit for the impression of every virtue that can adorn or can improve it.

As to the next life: our advantage is great and glorious, where, after having been faithful in that which is another's, in that which could be no otherwise a benefit to ourselves, than as we made it so to our fellow-creatures, we shall be rewarded with that happiness which shall be truly and eternally our own. This world, and all that we admire in it, shall fleet away; and, like the bird or arrow that flieth, leave not its track behind: nothing shall remain of all its wealth and splendor, but those fair deeds which we have wisely extracted from the use of them. These, indeed, shall remain, and shall carry us to the gates of heaven, where unspeakable joys shall be opened to our view: the testimony of those who have shared our benevolence, shall plead for our admission: the hearts which we have cheered under the heavy gloom of earthly affliction, shall sing
our

our entrance on the regions of eternal bliss ; and, in exchange for the glittering dirt we lent them here, shall point out our bright abode in heaven ; where angels shall conduct us to the throne of mercy with joyful acclamations ; and the Son of God receive us with this high applause—" Well done, good and faithful servants, enter ye into the joy of your Lord."

S E R M O N CIII.

ON OCCASION OF THE SUPPRESSION OF
THE RIOTS IN 1780.

P S A L M vii. 9 & seq.

Let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end, but establish the just.—God is angry with the wicked every day.—He hath also prepared for him the instruments of death.—Behold he travaileth with iniquity, and hath conceived mischief—But his mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down upon his own pate.

DAVID is frequent in his observations on the hazardous state of wicked men; and, in his prayers to God, under the afflictions he suffered from them, is earnest in calling down that destruction upon their heads, which they maliciously intended for others.

Some of his expressions, on this occasion, are so strong, that the good Christian, whose

religion commands him to "love his enemies," hesitates in his use of them.

But he mistakes the matter, and does not rightly attend to David's conduct or Christ's command. The enemies David was concerned with, were public enemies to his state and kingdom; the enemies Christ commands us to love, are private personal enemies. If David might go forth to destroy his enemies, in defence of his state and kingdom, he must wish their destruction; and, if it was allowable to wish it, it was allowable to pray for it;—and the good Christian, surely, may be allowed to read what David prayed.

I say read—for we are mistaken, if we think, that in reading the Psalmist's expressions, we must necessarily and always make them our own prayer to God. There are, indeed, many passages in the Psalms, where the good Christian may put himself in David's place, and pray as he did; as, where he prays for pardon of his sins, or praises God for his blessings: but, for the expressions he uses in his prayers to God against the enemies of his state and kingdom, the private Christian, when he reads them, cannot be understood as necessarily making them his own prayer, as David made them his; because he
is

is not a king as David was, though he be a sinner as David was ; nor, considered only in his private capacity, has he to do with enemies to his state. The Christian, therefore, under that consideration, only *reads*, but is not understood to *pray*.

Yet every Christian may be considered in a public, as well as in a private capacity ; he may be considered as a member of the state to which he belongs, and in the general welfare of which he is concerned ; and, whenever he is called upon, or whenever he is disposed, to offer up his prayers to God against the public enemies of the state to which he belongs, there can lie no exception against his making use of the same expressions which David used.

His religion does not forbid him — That allows, nay commands, us to provide for the preservation of the community in which we live ; and, when that cannot be procured but by the destruction of those who are enemies to it, there is no breach of Christ's command, or of Christian love, in praying earnestly for that which is so necessary to be applied.

The destruction, which we now see falling on some of those, whose horrid malice lately

shook this metropolis with consternation, was so necessary for the preservation of the state, that the best-hearted Christian may well rejoice in it, and none but the worst-hearted subjects will lament it—A destruction, which, though it falls on those, who are themselves destitute of humanity as well as justice, yet, falls not on them, but under the direction of both ; and, though they would have destroyed government without remorse, yet government destroys not them without legal trial.—“ I will have mercy and not sacrifice,” says the Almighty ; and human government doth well to imitate the Almighty, in affording those delinquents the mercy of judgment, who, their deserts only considered, stood a just sacrifice to the immediate fury of its resentment.—As for those who escape these trials, it is to be hoped, they escape, not to repeat their wickedness, but to repent of it.

It is much to be feared, that these are but instruments in the hands of others ; whose guilt will be greater, and whose judgment more severe, in proportion as their station and abilities should supply them with a better behaviour. The present executions may be of use to both ;—to the one, they may be a warning against being employed in such a work,
the

the consequence of which is such a death; to the other, it may be a warning against making use of such instruments, when they find, that a watchful Providence oversees their workings, who can both stop and punish them, when he thinks fit.—From whatever quarter the late outrage originated, the operations of it have exceedingly shocked every one—but those who promoted them; which shews the very strong effect of wickedness in hardening the hearts of men, when they can coolly contrive and execute what others cannot see, or even hear related, without horror.—Nor need we wonder at this state of the human heart, when God is turned out of it, and the devil hath full possession. In this situation, after religion hath long lost its influence in making them good, the name and pretence of it is employed in helping them to be wicked. It was the devil's first, and is his constant craft, to hang out false colours: and we live at a time, when the best names are applied to the worst purposes; when those call themselves Patriots, who study to disturb and ruin their country, and those call themselves Protestants, who lay such plans for the disturbance of our established Protestant religion as Papists would blush at, and Heathens would abhor.

Whether the late rioters had any design to overturn the state, or, whether they have done all this mischief, merely for mischief's sake—or from revenge—or to intimidate and force compliance with their demands in reforming the state;—these all are motives equally detestable; and those who act from such motives, are not likely to mend the state, whilst their own hearts are so wickedly disposed.—Disappointed ambition, indeed, is restless, and will wish mischief; but when malice and revenge set men to work it, if they do not work to full effect at once, they strengthen what they would destroy, and, instead of intimidating others, make themselves contemptible.

For, can the promoters of the late tumults reflect on what they have done, and think themselves respectable or safe?—Not only all good men, but all men, who are not so desperately wicked as themselves, must detest them: and, however safe they may think themselves, they may find that vengeance “is not dead, but sleepeth.” Or, should the vengeance of their country not reach them, they will not escape the vengeance of God; who will call them to a severe account for thus joining the great enemy of mankind in his great work,
of

of sporting with the lives and souls of men—employing them in wickedness, that they may betray them to their destruction.

As these exemplary punishments afford warning to those who are disposed to be enemies to the state, so they afford comfort to those who are its friends; when they thus see, that our government, besides its natural excellence, has natural strength and vigour to support itself against those who are wickedly set to disturb, if not destroy it;—that it has vengeance ready for the lowest, as well as wisdom superior to the highest, who insult it;—and that both church and state, however they may be molested, stand too firm to be destroyed.

When we reflect how the spirit of liberty (licentiousness rather) has long operated among us, and have lately seen the insults which have been committed on the king and parliament, we may reasonably infer, there are many among us, who are no friends to monarchy and our present form of government; and, when we see how the malice of the late riot was distinctly and eminently pointed at the bishops, we may as reasonably infer, there are many among us, who are no friends to episcopacy and the established church.

And

And if, with what we reflect and see of the present times, we compare what we read of the last century, we shall not only find our inferences to be just, but we shall also be enabled to judge, from example and experience, what both the friends and enemies of the present government may reasonably expect; and that, if the friends of government have reason to expect mischief and trouble, the enemies of government have also reason to expect shame and disappointment.

For they, in the last century, who demolished the church, could not establish and perpetuate their conventicles; which soon sunk into contempt, whilst the church rose from its fall with new vigor; and Cromwell's Republic, of which he himself grew tired, led the way to a restoration of monarchy.

Men may, for a time, work mischief, to serve their wicked purposes; but God will over-work them, to serve his own. England has been, is, and still may be, troubled with those, who envy and hate its church and government. This God may permit, to prove us. Long did he permit the Canaanites to be a thorn in the sides of his chosen people the Israelites. Yet, "the law and the word went forth from Jerusalem." "Judah was his sanctuary,

“ tuary, and Israel his dominion.” Nor was it out of Philistia or Canaan—but, “ out of Sion “ did God appear in perfect beauty.”

May God preside over, and bless, this our Sion!—the beauty of which is her spirit of toleration.

But beauty may prove fatal to those who possess it; and the best things, by abuse, become the worst. So far as toleration is consistent with the safety of our constitution in church and state, it is both beauty and strength; but when it exceeds those limits (and toleration must have limits) it is then no longer beauty and strength, but deformity and weakness.

I am not going into this subject; the discussion of which hardly suits this place, but belongs to another.—I shall only beg leave to say,

Our excellent constitution stands between Papists on one side, and Dissenters on the other. It becomes her to look civilly at both; but it is as much as her life is worth to embrace either. One has as much right to toleration as the other, and neither should turn a malignant eye upon the other, for being allowed that, the abuse of which in either is equally hurtful to the state, and should equally be restrained.—Each may *censure* appearances

ances in the other; but the state *judges* by real mischief. What real mischief either of them *are* at present working, doth not appear; what mischief both of them *can* work—let history shew.

S E R M O N C I V.

REFLECTIONS ON SOME CIRCUMSTANCES
OF CHRIST'S EARLY LIFE.

L U K E ii. 41.

*Now his parents went to Jerusalem every
year, at the feast of the passover.*

THE design of my present discourse is,
to offer you some remarks on the
gospel for the day *.

1. And, first, I would take notice of that
law in the Jewish religion, which occasioned
Joseph's and Mary's attendance at Jerusalem
at this time. All males were obliged to ap-
pear three times every year at Jerusalem, at
the three feasts of the passover, pentecost, and
the feast of tabernacles. A law, which evi-
dently carries in it a signature of Divine ap-
pointment; because no human wisdom could
ever have suggested it. What human legisla-

* The first Sunday after Epiphany.

tor,

tor, whose country lies surrounded with enemies (as the Jews did) would enact a law, by which the whole military strength of it should be drawn from its frontiers three times a year, by summoning all the males, from twenty to threescore years old, to assemble themselves in the midst of it? Moses, whose character for wisdom is indisputable, could not have made such a law, but in consequence of express direction from God; nor did God give him such direction, without giving him a promise along with it — that, during the absence of the people at these times, their enemies should not molest them; which, in fact, they never did; but which, in all reasonable expectation, they must often have done, if Divine power had not withheld them. This law then, together with another of the like extraordinary nature (by which the whole land lay untilld every seventh year) are evident marks of Divine appointment; by which God thought fit to distinguish his interposition in the government of that people; whose laws, therefore, had ample testimony of their authority, when not only the blessings they brought, but even the very burthens they imposed, did so strongly evidence a Divine institution.

This

This law did not enjoin women to attend these feasts; but, as it did not forbid them, we find they too resorted thither: their own sense of religion—their natural tenderness for those who went—dispositions, both of them, very predominant in the female sex, doubtless urged them to accompany their families and relations, at least one of the three times in the year.

2. Mary had a still nearer and stronger motive, which led her to Jerusalem on this occasion. Her child, Jesus, was now about twelve years old; an age, at which, according to the usual capacity of children, they are qualified for religious instruction. It was expressly commanded in the law of Moses, with respect to the observance of the passover, that as soon as children were capable of asking the question, "What mean ye by this service?" that they should be told what it meant (Ex. xii. 26.)—and be thereby instructed in their religious duties. Mary, like a good and careful parent, follows this command; and therein sets an example for all whose situation calls them to the imitation of it.

Children are not only the greatest blessings, but they are, too, the greatest trusts, that

Providence hath put into our hands : our own, their own, happiness depends upon our management of them ; and, as he who is intrusted with a jewel, for which he is accountable to him who lends it, is anxious where to repose it safely, so parents can lay their children no where more safely than in the care of God, who gave them, by bringing them early to an acquaintance with him, and filling their young minds with a love and reverence for religion. We hardly know how to suppose, that the child Jesus needed any religious instruction ; yet did his human soul, as well as body, admit of growth and improvement. We are told, “ he encreased in wisdom and “ stature ;” and though, in every degree of his advancement, he doubtless was above the common standard, yet we see he was not above the direction of his pious parent ; whom he attended to the temple, to perform the public duties of religion. It was Christ’s purpose, and it was his practice, “ to fulfil all righteousness ;” and he, whose death wrought our salvation, took not a step in his life, but what furnishes us with instruction. His infant steps to the temple, at his mother’s side, afford a beautiful lesson, both to parents
and

and children ;—to the former a lesson of religious care, to the latter a lesson of religious obedience.

3. This was the first time Jesus entered the temple of Jerusalem, after being brought thither in his mother's arms ;—his own temple ;—and which, by his messengers the Prophets, he had long since promised to visit. When he came there, his attention was fully occupied with the business of the place ; he joined the company of the learned doctors of the law, to hear their discourses ; and, though but a child, engaged himself in asking and answering questions, which, very probably, related to the law and the prophets. Scripture hath not acquainted us with the subject of this conference ; and, though some have told us, that it was customary with the Jews, for young persons to pass an examination, on these public occasions, as to their progress in religious knowledge (from whence they would suggest, that Jesus was engaged under the like examination) yet this hardly seems to have been the case ; for then his parents, who would have been too much interested in such a business, not to have attended it, would either not have left him, or would have known where to find him. It seems more likely,

that the human faculties of Jesus, already at a height above his years, invited by this occasion, displayed themselves on matters beyond the common capacity of children—though not to a degree that should raise a suspicion of his Divinity. He was not yet entered upon his ministry, and his present appearance in the temple was but a dawn of that glory, with which he afterwards filled it, and which far exceeded the glory that filled the former temple*. Thus engaged, it is not wonderful, but a lively stroke of natural description, that Jesus seemed not to think of his return home, but left his parents to set out without him;—which produced another circumstance in the story, as natural and as striking.

4. This was the anxiety of Joseph and Mary, when, after one day's travelling towards Nazareth, they found, upon enquiry,

* It is remarkable, how exactly this appearance of Jesus in the temple verifies the ancient prophecy, that “the scepter” (that is, the government) “should not depart from Judah till Shiloh” (that is, the Messiah) “came;”—for, precisely at the time when Jesus thus appeared in the temple, the Roman emperor reduced Judea into the form of a Roman province, and, instead of their former governors of their own nation, placed a procurator over them.

that

that he was no where in the company that travelled with them. Any mind may suppose their anxiety was very great; but it is only the heart of a parent, and a tender parent too, that can feel, what Mary felt on this occasion. Mary now felt the first thrust of that sword, which old Simeon prophesied should "pierce through her soul."—It sent her back, with the utmost consternation, to Jerusalem; where she found Jesus in the temple, engaged in conference with the doctors. Mary expostulates with Jesus by a question, in which we see natural affection predominant over anger;—"Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us?" "Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing." Jesus replies to her, by an answer, in which we see a sense of duty to God claiming a superiority over natural affection:—"How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" This answer of our Saviour's removes the difficulty, which naturally arises in the mind, from reflecting on Mary's anguish when she missed him; namely, that such a son should cause such anguish to a parent!—He was about his "Father's business;"—And so he was, when, hanging on the cross, he caused her still much greater anguish.

It was not without reason that Jesus betook himself to this conference, and did not acquaint his parents with it. As he was now entering on a business, in the execution of which he depended, not on their authority, but on the will and counsel of his heavenly Father, he claimed the same privilege of acting without their concurrence in this matter, as he afterwards claimed, at the marriage in Cana—when he set aside his mother's *direction*, though he complied with her *request*, for working the miracle.

Parental authority is sacred, so far as it reaches; but it has its bounds; and there are duties in life which must be performed *without* it, or even *against* it, should it interpose.—But, as every dutiful child will obey the parental authority in all matters within its limits, so no sensible parent will pretend to carry such authority to matters which lie beyond them. No good parent will use his authority over his children, in opposition to that duty, which both he and they owe to God; and though, in the common businesses of life, great respect is due to parental advice, yet every man must be left to judge and act for himself, in all cases wherein he stands accountable to God and his country for his behaviour.

haviour. The magistrate, in the execution of his office, stands clear of parental authority, and should stand clear of parental influence : and, in the inferior departments of life, however wise, as well as respectful, it is to have the concurrence of parents in the choice of our stations, as they certainly love us best, and, in general, are best capable and most willing, not only to direct, but also to assist us; yet, in the discharge of the duties belonging to our stations, parental authority drops the rein, and gives us up to a superior authority, in obedience to which we must hereafter direct our conduct.

5. It is said, that Joseph and Mary understood not the answer which Jesus gave them;—thus much, however, they understand from his answer—that he was engaged in a business, in which their parental authority had no place; though they might well be at a loss to understand what the nature and design of that business was. And here, again, we see Jesus asserting the privilege belonging to his engagement in a superior duty, that he did not think fit so much as to explain, even to his parents, what it was he was about; but left them to wait till a farther progress in his future ministry should discover it.

According to human sentiments and practice, we should hardly suppose, that Jesus would conceal the circumstances of his important business from his parents, in whose family he lived for thirty years of his life: but this Jesus did—whose conduct flowed from more than human sentiment. His mother, indeed, knew “from whence he was,” and the general purpose of his coming; and the knowledge of thus much, which in other cases might have excited a curiosity, if not suggested a claim for knowing more, in this excited a reverence, which withheld curiosity, and silenced such a claim. The particular circumstances of what Jesus was to do, and when and how he was to do it, were points, which Joseph and Mary ventured not to enquire into:—as these things were gradually to be opened to the world, they were, in human as well as Divine wisdom, till then to be concealed, even from his own family—else, according to the common disposition of mankind, they would hardly have kept their concealment.

We see from hence, as well as from the future manner of his conduct, that Jesus, though he was himself possessed with a full knowledge of all matters belonging to his dispensation,

dispensation, yet communicated, even to those who might well think themselves best entitled to be made acquainted with it, no more than he thought fit for their particular condition, and his own general design; and, if Christ thus kept many things from the knowledge of his mother and family, and afterwards from his intimate disciples, we cannot wonder, if he still withholds many things from our knowledge, which we may feel a curiosity to know:—we cannot wonder, I say, much less should any one make it matter of objection, that Christ still maintains that gradual method of opening his wonderful dispensation to mankind, which was at first promised by ancient prophecy, was afterwards displayed by his gospel, but which will be completed only at the consummation of all things.

6. The last circumstance worthy of remark, in the portion of Scripture before us, is, that Jesus, after making this his first appearance at the temple, returned with his parents to Nazareth, and appeared no more in public till he opened his ministry, almost twenty years after: during which time, the Evangelist tells us, “he was subject to his

A a 4

“parents,

“ parents, encreasing in wisdom, and in favour with God and men.”

There is a total silence in the Evangelists, as to the transactions of Christ during his abode at Nazareth; because the business, to which the Holy Spirit called the Evangelists, was to record only the transactions of his birth and ministry: and, however human curiosity might be gratified in being shewn the domestic circumstances of his retired life, yet Divine wisdom, which studies not the *curiosity* but the *instruction* of mankind, has thought fit that we should be made acquainted with no more of Christ's history, than it is necessary for us to know; hiding that part of it from our view, which, if set before us, might draw off our childish attention from those matters which we are more concerned to look at. Christ came into the world, not for his own sake, but for ours;—not to furnish men with materials for writing a history of Him, but to work their salvation; whatever transactions of his relate to that important work, are faithfully and punctually recorded; other transactions of his life Christ wanted not to shew, nor does man want to learn. Even when he came forth with his ministry, the

Evangelists

Evangelists have given us little more than some of his public discourses, and public actions; with no farther account of his private life and conversation, than is necessary for setting forth that example of meekness and benignity, which he for no other reason directed to be made known, but that it might be imitated, and which he for no other reason calls upon us to imitate, but that we may thereby make ourselves acceptable to God through him.

One thing, however, in Jesus's retirement at Nazareth, falls within our notice — He was there subject to his parents.

It is a useful lesson to see here, that our Saviour began his life with subjection and obedience to his parents. Christ set himself to be an example of the religion he taught; his religion is for men; and, though its rewards will hereafter advance us to a society with angels, its precepts, in the mean time, are laid on principles, which belong to human society; among which domestic obedience, as it first presents itself to us in the natural course of our life, so is it the foundation on which we shall most naturally and most securely place all succeeding duties of society. Next to God, who gives us our being, we
owe

owe reverence and obedience to those through whose means God hath thought fit to impart it; and, as order and obedience are the support of society, in all its parts, we are first taught them in the small sphere of domestic government; where, if men prove unruly, they are not likely to be quiet or useful members under public government;—for the duties of which they are ever best qualified, who have best practised obedience at home. Our Saviour's example in this point is wonderful, and should make us ashamed of our conduct, if, through any pride of eminence or endowment, we fret under the government that controuls us; when we remember that our Saviour submitted to the domestic government of a poor carpenter of Nazareth, though he was, and knew himself to be, Lord of the creation, and the Son of God.

In this situation, it is supposed, that Jesus worked at the employment of Joseph; and, considering the condition of Joseph's family, and the length of time Jesus lived in it, who was not likely to pass so many years in indolence, the supposition seems a very reasonable one; especially as we know it was a maxim with the Jews, that every man, however eminent, should be instructed in some handicraft business,

business. That Jesus should be assisting in the affairs of the family where he was placed, we may well conclude; and, as his applying himself to that employment on which the family depended, seems the most natural assistance he could afford them, it is very likely that he applied himself to it: though the Evangelists themselves do not expressly assert it, we gather from their history that it was the popular opinion he was so employed, thereby setting us an example of industry in our calling, as well as obedience to our parents.

These two virtues are the pillars of society—the support of due order in government, which directs the blessings that flow from it to run in their proper channels, and to their most useful purposes. And it is a circumstance in recommendation of Christ's religion, besides the Divine authority on which it claims our regard, that it abounds with precepts the most useful to society, as well as with doctrines the most comfortable to repentant sinners; that it shews us, if we will attend to its directions, how we may be useful and enjoy this life, as well as be happy in the next.

The

The Divine author of this religion condescended to leave the bosom of God, to be born and dwell among us, in order to teach us it; and the very first steps he took in human life, before he yet began to preach his doctrines, shew us the best example of religious and civil conduct. He was subject to his parents; and, not living an idle life, but applying himself to the common employments of the world, has shewn us, that religion is not a speculative but a practical business, to be intermixed with the social affairs of common life; the two main duties of which are, obedience to parents, and industry in our calling;—in the practice of which duties Jesus “encreased in wisdom, and in favour with God and men;” and those who imitate his example, shall be esteemed here, and happy hereafter.

SERMON

S E R M O N C V .

JONATHAN: OR THE POWER OF
FRIENDSHIP.

I S A M U E L x v i i i . I .

The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.

WE will take up this story, not merely to contemplate the mischievous effects of envy; but with a view to a different passion, which offers itself as a sort of contrast to it; and is as amiable as that is odious.

As soon as Saul's envy began to shew itself in acts of open enmity against David, the friendship of Jonathan interposed to stop its effects, and to relieve the troubles, which it threw in David's way.

If

If the behaviour of Saul sets before us an instance of envy worth avoiding, the conduct of Jonathan gives us an example of friendship worth our imitation. And a friendship it was which arose from a proper principle; and was conducted by *prudence*, as well as animated by *affection*. The circumstances of Jonathan's behaviour are peculiar to himself; and few, if any, may feel a call of friendship exactly in the same track of circumstances: but the same sentiments will conduct variety of actions; and, the nearer we bring our friendship to his plan, by raising it upon a *sound principle*, and directing it by *reasons of prudence*, the more amiable, as well as the more useful, will it shew itself.

We find the first mention of Jonathan's affection for David immediately after the battle with the Philistines, where David had signalized himself by his victory over Goliath: for then it was, as the history informs us, that "Jonathan's soul was knit to the soul of David." The inward affection he felt for him, immediately shewed itself in acts of outward testimony: he entered into a covenant of friendship with him, and, dressing him in his own attire, "even to his sword, his bow, and his girdle," conducted him directly to his father's

father's court; who at present was well pleased to admit him there.

As Jonathan was himself a warrior, and as he took such an opportunity of first declaring his friendship for David, it may seem as if he was led to it upon a military principle, and that he loved him with a soldier's love. But Jonathan's friendship sprung from a nobler principle. David's combat with Goliath shewed him in a more exalted character than that of a soldier; the pretensions he set forth before he engaged, and the success he met with, shewed him to be a favourite servant of the Lord's; and there was a principle of religion, as well as a military sympathy, which knit the soul of Jonathan to the soul of David.

Jonathan saw that the Lord was with David; and he might be as quick in discovering where he was leading him, as Saul was: but he reasoned much better upon the discovery than Saul did; who ventured to be angry at God's choice, and made David the object of his hatred, for a reason which entitled him to his esteem. So rash and so wicked is envy, that it sets our own weak and unreasonable wishes in opposition to the Divine wisdom, and lifts up an arm of flesh against the resist-
less

less arm of the Almighty. Jonathan reasoned better—yet his circumstances as fitly led him to envy David as Saul's did, had he felt the same disposition to follow them.—If he saw God's designation of David to fill the throne of Israel, he saw what was contrary to his own natural expectations; for his birth and character might easily point him out as his father's successor: but when David's conduct and success led Jonathan to conclude, that God had designed it otherwise, we see he had prudence and religion enough to submit to the appointment; and, instead of hating the man who was to set him aside from his father's throne, he loved the man who was qualified to fill it, and fixed his esteem where God had shewed his choice.

The first thing that claims our care, in the management of friendship, is the principle on which we place it. If we intend it should be durable and useful, we must consult reason, more than passion or fancy, in forming it, and rather place it upon what we can approve, than on what merely gives us pleasure. There are more qualities in men that will give us pleasure, than there are that will furnish us with that satisfaction which is a reasonable call and encouragement to friendship.

When

When I speak of the principle on which we place our friendship, I mean both the *object* and the *motive*:—and the rule for our conduct will be in this short maxim—to choose a good man for a good reason. This is the only secure principle of friendship; which, as it is deficient in either or both of these points, has either no continuance or no commendation. We see what are called friendships, where we cannot discover either a good object or a good motive; nay, where we can discover that both are bad; but such are more properly leagues of vice or pleasure than friendship; and the only favourable circumstance belonging to them is one that is quite opposite to true friendship; which is, that they are very apt to be broke. When men's vicious or idle humours bring them together, they are as easily separated as they were united; for those who love they know not why, are as apt to hate they know not why: or, where only pleasure and interest have made the union, pain or mischief will dissolve it. But when virtue points out the object of our friendship, and inspires us with motives for embracing it, her work is more useful as well as durable; she works by reason's, not by fancy's rule;

and the friendship she produces partakes of her own steady and immutable nature.

- We see how Jonathan laid the foundation of his friendship for David—he loved the virtues of the man, and was disposed to honour them as he saw they were the gifts of God, and instruments of his wisdom. His friendship, thus built on a love of virtue, and directed by a pious submission to the purposes of God, was as steady as it was amiable in its operations, spread peace and complacency in his own breast, and brought comfort and relief to the breast of David.

After Jonathan had expressed his friendship for David, upon his victory over Goliath, we hear no more of it during the course of Saul's treacherous practices. Not that we are to suppose it lay dormant all this time, but that it had no proper opportunity of being active; Saul's proposals for honouring and advancing David, however treacherous they were, yet were too specious to be opposed and defeated; and Jonathan would hardly have appeared as David's friend, by stopping his preferment in the army, or his match with the king's daughter; the mischief of which proposals lay not in the making them, and was only a probable,

bable, not a certain consequence of accepting them. Jonathan, therefore, watched the progress of his father's resentment, till his friendship could be of service to David; and kept clear of an imprudence, which is but too common, when we cripple our friendship by putting it upon unnecessary attempts, and, by exerting it unseasonably, not only do mischief where we least intended it, but disable ourselves from doing good where it would have been most practicable.

As soon as Saul's public command for the blood of David, made his designs too plain to be mistaken, as well as too dangerous to be neglected, Jonathan flew to David with the discovery of it; and advised him to be concealed till he had an opportunity of conversing with his father, the result of which conversation he would communicate to him.

Now Jonathan's friendship began to set itself at work, and shewed that true management which true friendship as naturally deserves on one side, as it naturally suggests on the other. His courage led him to undertake David's defence before his father. His good sense directed him to ground his defence upon such topics as set the merit of his friend

in its proper light, and, at the same time, disposed Saul to see and to acknowledge it. The history says, " he spake good of David to his father," and dissuaded him from shedding the blood of a faithful servant, who had been so far from doing, or even intending, any thing to his prejudice, that he had freely ventured his life in defence of his crown, when he fought and subdued the champion of the Philistines—That this was an exploit of such a signal nature, as not only shewed David's readiness and ability in his service, but carried with it a testimony of the Divine concurrence in his favour—That, therefore, he would be deficient in the discharge of that honourable regard which he professed for God, and of that gratitude and justice which his subjects had reason to promise themselves from him, if, without a cause, he should seek the ruin of a faithful servant, in return for the acceptable deliverance he had wrought for him, and in opposition to that Divine protection, which so remarkably distinguished him.—Friendship is never more amiably engaged than when it is defending a good cause. Whoever steps forth in defence of virtue, secures commendation by the choice he makes of his party ;

party; and, whoever succeeds in his defence, reaps a double reward, from the thanks of the public, and the thanks of his friend.

Jonathan's remonstrance had its desired effect upon Saul;—it softened his malicious intentions against David, and he gave Jonathan not only his word, but his oath, that he should be safe.

Jonathan, who seemed to be aware how soon envy and malice are apt to repent of any favourable concessions they may make, had provided against it; and, that Saul might have no leisure of repentance between his promise and the reconciliation which Jonathan intended, he had brought him to this conference near the very place where David was concealed, and from whence he might immediately bring him forth to accept the benefit he had been procuring.—This was accordingly done; Jonathan introduced David directly to his father's presence, and to his favour.

But envy is too hard to be subdued, though it is sometimes weak enough to be diverted. The concessions it makes rather proceed from a momentary abatement of the passion, than from any real encrease or superiority of reason's power; and therefore are liable to be with-

drawn, whenever the passion resumes its strength. So it was with this reconciliation of Saul's. His envy dropt its present purposes; but, like an artful foe, was employing the opportunity of a truce in recollecting its forces for a future engagement. Another war with the Philistines, and more success of David's against them, raised Saul's envy to its usual height. Again he took distaste at David, and again the javelin flew to gratify it. After this, David betook himself to his own house, where Saul's fury pursued him, with assassins to dispatch him: this obliged him to make his escape, and to take refuge with Samuel, in his college of prophets.

There is no sanctuary sacred enough to forbid the attacks of envy. Saul pursued him thither. — But mark the peculiar interposition of God upon this occasion, who would not allow him to disturb the sacred repose of that retirement with the riot of malicious murder; but, instead of suffering him to execute his own wicked errand, forced him to join in the holy business of the place! He withheld Saul's hand from the villainy he most wished for, and employed his tongue in such acts of devotion and adoration as he least intended. So that this incident, instead of gratifying
Saul's

Saul's purposes, served only to advance his own shame, and David's honour.

David, however, thinking it either not safe or not convenient to stay with Samuel in his college, had recourse to his friend Jonathan, with whom he freely expostulated upon his troublesome and dangerous situation. This opens a conference between Jonathan and David; in which David begins with this expostulation:—"What have I done? what is my iniquity, and what is my sin before thy father, that he seeketh my life?" To which Jonathan answers: "God forbid! thou shalt not die: behold my father will do nothing, either great or small, but he will shew it me: and why should my father hide this thing from me? It is not so."

Jonathan answers as if he knew nothing of his father's designs against David's life; and yet, considering the late public attempts which Saul had made against it, one would think that could hardly be. Jonathan, perhaps, disssembled his own fears, not only out of a tender regard to the fears of David, which needed less to be confirmed than to be contradicted; but also out of a dutiful respect to his father, of whose repeated malice he was loth to be an evidence. If this was the case, that

Jonathan spoke rather according to his wishes than his judgment, and that he contradicted David's fears because he would set them aside to make room for deliberation; his care for David will appear dexterous as well as tender.—But I take Jonathan's ignorance to be real, and that he spoke not only what he wished, but what he believed. Diffimulation was no part of his character, and was hardly practicable in that tender affection he felt for David, which could not have concealed a danger which he was fully persuaded threatened his life. When Saul before gave command to kill David, Jonathan immediately flew to him with the discovery; and, had he now been as fully persuaded of Saul's murderous intentions as he was then, he would have used the same care. It is to be observed, that there had been no public command given to kill David, since Saul had promised Jonathan, upon his oath, that he should not die: so that Jonathan might know of the messengers being sent to David's house, and of those who were sent to Samuel's college, and yet might not know the private orders and instructions they had; and, in confidence of his father's oath, might be fully persuaded that they had no orders to kill him. Jonathan, therefore, might well

well tell David, "it is not so," when he had his father's oath to support his opinion: and, in this view of the matter, Jonathan shews more regard to his father than in the other; as it is a greater compliment to depend upon another's honesty than to conceal his dishonesty. Jonathan, as many an honest man does, judged of another's sentiments by his own; and, if he judged better of his father than he deserved, by firmly believing he would not falsify his oath, the mistake turns to his own honour, as it shews his own regard for such a religious obligation.

Jonathan, very *innocently*, argues in support of his opinion, that the love his father had for him, and the free intercourse he enjoyed with him, must have let him into the knowledge of such design, had there been any. David, as *delicately*, retorts this observation upon him—"Thy father certainly knoweth
" that I have found grace in thine eyes; and he
" saith, Let not Jonathan know this, lest he
" be grieved." David might naturally enough have told Jonathan—In consequence of your friendship for me, you have more reason to suppose your father's hatred than his love of you;—but this had been too harsh an observation, when Jonathan had expressed a
confidence

confidence in his father's love. David, therefore, answers in a manner which rather heightens than diminishes an opinion which Jonathan seemed fond of, and, at the same time, does justice to the love he had for David. So delicate, as well as faithful, is a friendship founded on virtue, and conducted by good sense, that it is as cautious in giving offence, as it is ready in doing service.

After much tender and delicate debate, David assures Jonathan, that his danger was imminent, and his fears just, notwithstanding Jonathan's endeavours for persuading him to the contrary:—"As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between me and death." And to confirm this, for Jonathan's conviction, rather than his own, he proposes a method by which Saul's real intentions towards him might be discovered, David was to absent himself from Saul's table, when it was his duty to attend there. Jonathan was to make an apology for his absence; which, if Saul accepted, it should be well; but, if he resented it, the worst was to be concluded. They then solemnly renewed their covenant of friendship; and, not content with securing the pleasure and advantage of it to themselves, extended it to their posterity.

This

This is a stroke, in the picture of friendship now before us, which, if it be too fine to be imitated, is, I hope, not too fine to be seen and to be admired. How disinterested must be that love, which fixed its wishes on what it could not enjoy! and what solid strength must that friendship feel within itself, which could lay hold of futurity, and claim existence there! Nothing could prompt this seemingly extravagant stretch of friendship, but that very principle which made it practicable. Jonathan it was who made this stretch of friendship; and his submission to the will of God in the designation of David for the throne, as it prompted him to see, so it entitled him to ask for the benefits attending his advancement: and, finding that God had transferred the protection to other hands, he shewed that obedience to him, and that generous care for his posterity, to seek it where he had placed it. After this, Jonathan and David agreeing upon a signal by which David might be made acquainted with Saul's intentions, David retired to his concealment, and Jonathan went home to make trial of his father.

The success of it was such as he least wished, yet had the most reason to expect. Jonathan acquitted

acquitted himself like a true friend, and apologized for David's absence; but Saul was more exasperated than pacified by his apology; and, instead of excusing David, flew out in resentment against Jonathan, and, after severely reproaching him for countenancing David, at the expence of his own interest, he rashly levelled his javelin at him, which Jonathan narrowly avoided.

With this unhappy event of his trial, he repairs to the field where David had hid himself. He gave the signal, according to agreement, by which David understood his doom, and that he had nothing now to do but to make his escape. The signal was contrived to avoid the hazard of a personal conference, which at that time might be dangerous to both; but now, finding they must be separated, affection prompted each of them strongly to an interview; which, finding the coast clear, they indulged themselves in.

The interview was such as distressed friendship would naturally produce. David, to express his sense of Jonathan's love for him, "bowed himself three times" to the earth; and, to express his own affection for Jonathan, poured forth a tender shower of tears: Jonathan met him with equal testimony of
grief

grief and love; and mutual embraces and mutual tears, as they were the strongest, so they were almost the only expressions of their friendship which they could then apply.—Jonathan, however, enjoined him the remembrance of their solemn covenant, and, blessing him with the wishes of his love, they parted, David to seek his fortune, and Jonathan to the city.

We have seen, in the course of this story, an instance of friendship properly founded, and animated with warmth and tenderness; and, as is generally the case with such sort of friendships, it is easy to observe with what prudence as well as warmth it was conducted. Jonathan saw enough, in the virtues and distresses of David, to excite his love and his pity; yet he conducted himself, not only with a friendly regard to the distress and merit of David, but with a filial regard to him who was the author of that distress. He followed the call of friendship; but not beyond the call of his allegiance to his father. Even at that instant when the passion of friendship most forcibly wrung his heart, when David was taking his leave, and Jonathan dismissed him from his bosom to the severities of exile; even then, when nature cast the most eager
view

view after him, prudence suppressed any proposal of following him; but, after affording him such services as were consistent with his duty to his father, and giving him only those tears which that duty could not forbid him to bestow, he brought back his heart, afflicted, indeed, and broken, but laid it at his father's feet.

Nor let it diminish the merit of Jonathan's conduct, in not following David, that his interest, as well as his allegiance, kept him at home; and that he preferred the ease and honour of his present situation, to the hazard and disgrace of turning rebel. It is commendable to see and follow what is our reasonable interest; and, as well-conducted friendships will never demand us to neglect it, and ill-conducted friendships generally lead us to sacrifice it, it will be at all times the best post of service to have a suitable regard to it: and Jonathan was a better friend to David because he was a friend to himself.

Extravagance of affection may often be the consequence of friendship; but it is no necessary part of it: on the contrary, it is so far from supporting, that it weakens friendship. So long as we take a prudent care of ourselves, we shall be better enabled to take a friendly
care

care of others ; but when our affections hurry us beyond prudence, they hurry us beyond our strength ; by which means, whilst we abate the affections of others, by disappointing them of what we *cannot* do, we enhance our own demand for them, by what we *feel* we have done. This saps the foundation of friendship ; which, when it is founded on a proper regard for others, and maintained by a prudent regard for ourselves, will stand against the storms of adversity, and will better serve the purposes it is intended for ; as a *castle of defence*, to which we may have recourse, than as a *weather-beaten tent*, to be worn out by constantly attending us.

We hear little more of Jonathan after his separation from David ;—but it is easy to conclude, that his situation in his father's court gave him frequent opportunities of serving his friend David, though at a distance ; and that he chose better for David, as well as for himself, in returning home, where he might watch the very birth of those mischiefs which daily threatened him, and either suppress or weaken them in their progress : had he followed David's fortunes, he had made them worse ; and, whilst he encreased his troubles, would have disabled himself from relieving them.

them. With David, he must have struggled, not only with the envy of a jealous king, but with the resentment of an injured father, and, at the same time, would have lost the merit of his friendship in the guilt of rebellion against his father. At home, he enjoyed his father's love, and made it an instrument for relieving the troubles which David suffered from the envy of the king. He could watch his father's heart, improve every favourable sentiment he saw rise within it, and soften, if not suppress, the malignant ones. He could guard his father's ear from court suggestions to the prejudice of his friend; which, without a check from his presence there, would have rose to press the sinking fortune of David, and to hasten his destruction.—In short, Jonathan chose not only the most honourable, but the most important post of friendship, from whence he could dispense the several benefits which flow from the united characters of a *great man*, a *true subject*, and a *faithful friend*.

S E R M O N C V I .

ON THE PERSON AND MISSION OF
JESUS CHRIST.

GALATIANS iv. 4, 5.

When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

THE text suggests an answer to the question—Why Christ came so late into the world?—He came in the “fulness of time;”—that is, after a series of prophecy had taken place; by which, as mankind were gradually prepared for his coming, so they were afterwards furnished with the fullest evidence of his Divine authority, when he did come.

The text next tells us *who he was*, and *why he came*.

VOL. III.

C c

The

The Scripture tells us, that a Divine person, who is of the same eternal nature with God, and who, receiving this nature from God, is therefore called the Son of God, and is truly God, did take also human nature upon him; and, in that nature, was born of a woman, became truly man, lived among us, and died for our salvation. This the Scripture tells us, not for us to comprehend how it was, but for us to believe that it is true; which is as much as we want in our present state; and we may well be content to wait till we approach nearer to God, for comprehending this mystery, if, whilst we are here, we are but careful to apply what we believe to be true.

The dignity of the person is indisputably the highest that can be conceived.—What was his business? or why did he come down among us? The text, the whole gospel answers—it was “to redeem mankind, that “we might receive the adoption of sons of “God.”

Mankind were sinners, and had lost the favour of God: nor could they, by the light of their own natural reason, be satisfactorily assured, that repentance would serve them for recovering that favour. The Son of God, therefore,

therefore, came down, to make a revelation of God's will to mankind upon this matter : to preach repentance to them, and to declare the acceptableness of it, with a certainty of pardon, in a manner consistent with the honour of the divine laws, by giving himself a sacrifice and expiation for sin. He came to be a mediator between God and man ; to procure us the assistance of God's Holy Spirit, as a principle of a new and divine life ; and to be the author of eternal salvation to all them who believe and obey him.

This gracious work of our redemption, we have set before us upon a well-attested revelation from God. The natural reason of man could never, indeed, have proposed such a method of our salvation ; but the natural reason of man may well accept it, upon the authority on which it stands : the whole of it is beyond our discovery ; but no part of it beyond our approbation, unless it be a maxim to approve of nothing which we cannot discover ; a maxim which is totally inconsistent with our natural state, and which, therefore, we may at least suspect does not necessarily belong to our religious state.

An unprejudiced mind will not only approve, but be highly thankful for, what reve-

lation sets forth in the work of our redemption. The very great dignity of the person concerned in it, justly raises our admiration ; and we are ready to say, with the Psalmist, “ Lord, “ what is man, that thou art thus mindful “ of him ! or the son of man, that thou so “ regardest him !” But we are to remember, that man is not the only object in this work : the law he violates by his disobedience must be taken into the consideration ; which, being the law of God, the honour of God is concerned in the matter ; and, offended as it is by the disobedience of man, must needs be satisfied in the work of man’s redemption : however natural, therefore, it may be for us to think, that God might forgive man, without so costly a mediation as was applied in his favour, we must allow it to be as reasonable to think, that some provision should be made to secure his own dignity, as well as to recover man ; and who but God himself shall determine how much is sufficient for vindicating the dignity of his own laws ? When, therefore, we consider the work of our redemption, as containing in it a vindication of God’s majesty and honour, we may almost cease to wonder at the mediation which was applied ; since, however it may exceed the condition of
man,

man, it cannot be too much for vindicating the majesty of God; the higher the mediation, the greater the vindication; and, however we may think God might have pardoned man with less, we cannot determine that he might have justified himself with less. And even with respect to man, we think not accurately, when we make it matter of difficulty to admit, that God should save so mean a creature at so great expence. He who, in the constant work of his natural Providence, observes and directs every particle of inanimate matter, without whose care not a sparrow falleth to the ground, or a hair of our head perishes, may surely be admitted, in the conduct of his moral Providence, to take care of man, and save him from destruction. There is nothing in the object, however mean, that can disparage the dignity of God in saving any of his creatures; since, whatever is worth creating, is undoubtedly worth preserving: nor is the method of his saving man, by sending his Son among them to teach them his will, to recover them from sin, and lead them to happiness, any more a disparagement of his dignity, than it is to be himself employed in cloathing the grass of the field, and feeding the young ravens that call upon him.

The method God was pleased to take for the recovery of man, as it was the highest vindication of his honour and dignity, could be no disparagement of it; and, for the great circumstance belonging to it, that God should become man, that the Divine and human nature should be united in one person, it is, doubtless, above our comprehension; and so is the union of soul and body; yet, as we are assured of the latter from what we feel, so we are assured of the former by a well-attested revelation from God: neither of them is absurd or impossible; and both are equally incomprehensible to us, in our present imperfect state.

Instead, therefore, of being led by our ignorance to distrust what we cannot comprehend, let our faith in God's word lead us to a sober use of what he hath set before us. That mankind is saved from the guilt and punishment of sin, by no less a means than the death of the Son of God, shews us the heinous nature of sin, the dignity and importance of those laws which he hath set us to walk by, and the indispensable necessity of using our best endeavours to live up to them; and is therefore a proper check upon our presumption. On the other hand, that the Son
of

of God condescended to this gracious work on our behalf, shews us his love and regard for us ; assures us of the success of, what he undertook, if we are not wanting to ourselves ; and is therefore a proper encouragement of our obedience ; which, being at best but imperfect, and liable to frequent interruptions, how comfortable a motive is it to repentance, when we consider how great a person has interposed, and how great means have been applied, for procuring us a pardon of our sins, if we will sincerely repent and forsake them ! In many temporal mischiefs, which we draw upon ourselves, repentance is a fruitless work, and we are forced to sit down under them, though with a sincere inclination to a better conduct. This is not the case in our spiritual mischiefs ; there, true repentance is always successful ; not through its own merit, but through the merits of what the Son of God hath done : there our sincere good purposes are effectual, not through their own strength, but through the assistance of the Son of God. However naturally, then, sin may work mischief in us, it is our own fault if it works despair. Let us but look up to Him, who hath interposed to save us, and at the intercession he makes for us :—the Son of God, the eter-

nal only Son of his bosom and substance, can never purchase or intercede in vain.

But then, let us look up to him with a hearty faith and true repentance ; nor let us so think of the sufficiency of the Son of God in saving us, as to forget the terms on which he has proposed to do it : we may well take encouragement from the former for setting ourselves to repentance ; but we should well beware of the presumption in applying to him without it.

Thus the reflection, that the Son of God is our Saviour, will afford us comfort under the greatest uneasiness we can feel in this state—the uneasiness of a guilty mind ; and will inspire us with a sense of love and gratitude to God, and with sincere resolutions of obedience. And, for the better security of such sentiments and good resolutions, let us most readily accept and unfeignedly reverence that religion which he taught, whilst he was with us in the flesh, and which is delivered down to us in records of his own inditing. All instruction from God claims our attention and reverence, whether he speaks to us by the voice of nature, or by the voice of his prophets, or by the ministry of angels ; but, when he speaks to us by his Son, and sends him
down

down among us, with the most gracious offers of his love and mercy, with the fullest revelation of his will, and of our duty, we are then obliged to attend with the highest reverence and observance:—the more so, because this, which is his fullest instruction, is also his last. We should therefore be very careful how we despise or neglect it. The infidel laughs at God's instructions, and is above being taught by him; but the time will come, when he shall sorely lament what he hath taught himself. The Christian, however, will rejoice and comfort himself in God's word; and, when he reflects on this, the greatest and the last revelation of it, by his Son Christ Jesus, will say, with the Apostle, —“ Therefore we ought to give the more
“ earnest heed to the things which we have
“ heard, lest at any time we should let them
“ slip; for, if the word spoken by angels was
“ stedfast—how shall we escape, if we ne-
“ glect so great salvation, which is spoken to
“ us by the Lord himself?”

1891

1892

1893

1894

1895

1896

1897

1898

1899

1900

1901

1902

1903

1904

1905

1906

1907

1908

1909

1910

1911

1912

1913

1914

1915

1916

1917

1918

1919

S E R M O N CVII.

ON THE MINISTRY OF JOHN THE
BAPTIST.

M A T T H E W iii. 1.

*In those days came John the Baptist, preaching
in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, Repent
ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*

J O H N the Baptist was the forerunner of
Christ:—his conception and birth were
distinguished by miracles; and it was de-
clared, that he should be “filled with the Holy
“ Ghost, even from his mother’s womb.”

Thus extraordinarily distinguished in his
birth, when he grew up, he betook himself
to the wilderness, not to indulge himself in
an inactive contemplative life; but, as the
text expressly says, to *preach*; for the wil-
derness of Judea was inhabited, though un-
frequented. The business for which Pro-

§

vidence

vidence intended him was to preach repentance to the Jews, and to introduce Christ among them; who, having hitherto lived in obscurity at Nazareth with his parents, was now ready to enter upon his ministry. The Baptist's business did well admit that sort of preparation through which he advanced to it; the severity of his doctrine would be best recommended by the severity of his own conduct, and the divinity of it would be more distinguishable, the less he had to do with the conversation of men.

As he was appointed the harbinger of Christ, the circumstances of his life and conduct were adapted to his character. Christ was coming, not in dignity but humility, to open his gospel first to the poor and lowly; and his harbinger first began his preaching among the few and forlorn tenants of the wilderness, before he advanced into the more populous and cultivated parts of the country. The subject, too, of his preaching was repentance; which better suited with a spare and hard course of life, than with plenty and delicacy. Besides, as ancient prophecy had set forth the harbinger of the Messiah, as coming in the "spirit and power of Elias," whose austerity of conduct was well known,

it was a circumstance fitted to raise attention to his preaching, when he dwelt, fared, and dressed like Elias.

Yet, how apt are we to mistake what is, with great propriety, set before us! The Baptist's obscure manner of life, at his entrance upon his duty, has struck many as an example for relinquishing theirs, and for burying the active duties of their stations in a lazy, though religious, solitude. His austere manner of life, which well suited his character, the hypocrite too often takes to his use, and claims to be esteemed religious for his outward strictness of behaviour. But the Baptist, in the wilderness, was neither in solitude nor idleness; nor did he assume the dress, without expressing too the spirit and power of Elias.

But men find it easier to slip on an outward covering, than to tear off the evil habits of the mind; and in thus making themselves faints, they make such sinners of their memories, as to credit their own lie, and to believe they are what they pretend to be. But the eye of God sees through our disguises, however we may impose on others or on ourselves; and those who have true religion, will take care of the heart, and leave externals to follow

follow of course ; too much anxiety about which betrays inward deformity ; but inward purity, as it wants not what is too much in externals, will naturally produce what is sufficient and proper.

But there is another circumstance, which heightens the propriety of the Baptist's solitary life. As God had distinguished his birth by miracles, so he had made his coming the subject of ancient prophecy.—“ Behold,” says Malachi, “ I will send you Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord, and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers.” That this prophecy is meant of John the Baptist, is evident from the angel's application of it to him, when he tells his father, Zacharias, that the son which was then promised, should “ go before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” If John the Baptist was to represent Elias in the spirit and power of his preaching, there was great propriety that he should imitate him too in his manner of living ; the rather, because the

the Jews, like other men, would be struck with the outward appearance ; and, finding that he dwelt, fared, and dressed like Elias, would the more readily attend to him as preaching like Elias.

Such appearance of the Baptist not only answered the prophecy given of him, and agreed with the doctrine of repentance which he preached, but it well suited the character he bore, as the forerunner of Christ. Christ was coming to remove the effects of the original curse, by which man was condemned to labour and trouble ; it was suitable, therefore, that his forerunner should shew some presages, as it were, of the great blessing that was coming, and exhibit himself as in some degree superior to that curse, which had fallen upon man, and which Christ was to abolish. The Baptist, therefore, passed not his life in toil, nor did he eat bread with the sweat of his brow. His table was ready spread for him ; his raiment as readily prepared as his table ; and his dwelling more readily than both. His manner of life was without labour and without want ; and supplied men with a hint for recalling their thoughts to that simplicity and innocence in which the first man lived, before he stood in need of house
and

and raiment. He lived in the desert, in full contemplation and study of Divine wisdom; and from thence came forth among men, a pattern and preacher of righteousness.

It was by the direction of God's Spirit that the Baptist went into solitude; and it was by the same direction that, after continuing in it for some time, he left it to go and preach on the banks of Jordan; a circumstance worth noting, lest we draw a wrong lesson from the Baptist's conduct, in favour of a recluse and solitary life. We see by what appointment the Baptist entered upon it, and to what eminent services of God's providence it was preparatory: from whence we may reasonably conclude, that it is a kind of life which we are not to undertake merely to indulge a melancholy, or, if you will, a devout, temper of mind; though the former is too often mistaken for the latter, and that passes for a spiritual love after heavenly objects, which is, perhaps, little more than a splenetic distaste of worldly ones. Our duty, certainly, lies in that state of life to which it shall please God to call us; and we may reasonably presume, that, unless it be upon some extraordinary occasions, which will never fail to distinguish themselves, God will hardly call us out of
that

that state of society for which he hath made and appointed us.—Many of the first Christians were driven into solitude by heathen persecutions; and, to get out of danger, very naturally, and very prudently, betook themselves to caves and desarts; but this way of life, which at first took its rise from necessity, afterwards grew up into superstition; and, under a notion of maintaining a stricter piety, men ran into caves, when they might have lived as quietly, and every whit as piously, in their own houses. I need not take notice how the church of Rome advanced upon this error, till the excess shewed the mischief of it—These religious retirements in time grew up into monasteries; and monasteries in time overspread Europe; which, however they might be called religious foundations, when they were first built, stood long enough to deserve a quite different title. If religion opened the doors of these monasteries, vice and error soon took the opportunity of going in at them. The monks, who were shut up in them, from having a sufficiency, grew lazy; then getting wealth, and, at last, wallowing in abundance and superfluity, they became notoriously wicked, as history sufficiently testifies.—But, to return to the Baptist.

He, in his solitude, was prepared to distinguish himself in public, and, at the time appointed by God, came forth from the wilderness to the banks of Jordan, to preach to his countrymen the Jews: his commission went no farther, though his preaching was the beginning of the Gospel of Christ, which was to go over the whole world; yet, what he had now in commission to declare, did immediately and very materially concern the people of the Jews. They were now in expectation of the Messiah; under whom they looked for a glorious kingdom; yet the time was near at hand, when they were to be distinguished, not by glory, but by destruction. The Messiah was coming; but, what they little expected, he was coming to suffer among them; and they were to be the instruments of his sufferings, by their infidelity and enmity against him. This treatment of the Messiah, added to their other wickedness, which was at this time become extraordinarily great, would fill up the measure of their sins, and ripen them for Divine vengeance.

Such, and so wonderfully laid, are the works of Divine wisdom, that his judgments and his mercies are directed to promote each other. God sent his Son into the world, to suffer death

death for our redemption, at a time when the wickedness of the Jews was great enough to inflict that death upon him; and that act, which filled up the measure of their iniquity, and brought down destruction upon their heads, opened the gate of righteousness, and brought salvation to mankind.—In this situation of the Jews, and under these purposes of Providence, the Baptist comes among them, and preaches — “Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

This expression “the kingdom of heaven,” is used with some variety of meaning in the Scripture; its general meaning is, undoubtedly, the kingdom of the Messiah; and, principally, that heavenly state, which, through his merits, we hope for hereafter; with a view to which, it is called “the kingdom of heaven,” and, as an introduction to which, he hath set up his kingdom over us upon earth, by the dispensation of his Gospel, and the propagation of the Christian religion among mankind.

But within this general meaning of the expression, as it signifies the kingdom of the Messiah, is contained that particular instance of his royal power, which is exerted in protecting the faithful, and punishing the dis-

obedient, among his subjects: and it seems to be with a view to this, that the Baptist directed his preaching to the Jews, and exhorted them to repentance. For, though repentance be a suitable preparation for the kingdom of the Messiah, considered in its general and spiritual meaning, as containing the pardon of sin through Christ; yet it was immediately necessary for the Jews, to whom the Baptist was preaching, as they stood upon the very brink of that destruction, which swallowed up their nation not many years after. And, that the Baptist had this particular object in view, seems plain from the prophecies which foretold his coming. Malachi says, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord." There are but two events which come up to this expression of the Prophet—the destruction of Jerusalem, and the general judgment; and, surely, it is with greater propriety that the Baptist is called the forerunner of the former, than of the latter. The destruction of Jerusalem being then the object in the prophecy, it seems reasonable to conclude, that it was the object likewise in the Baptist's preaching. Isaiah saith, that, to prepare the way for that coming

coming of the Lord, of which Elijah, that is, the Baptist, was to be the preacher, “every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain”—A description, which, however it may suit, as it does very well, with the preparation of men’s tempers for the reception of Christ’s Gospel, and the removal of such obstacles, as should hinder its propagation, yet most remarkably and literally agrees with the preparation that was actually made for the Roman army, when it advanced, under Titus, to the destruction of Jerusalem, as the Jewish Historian, Josephus, expressly relates. But the Baptist himself sufficiently discovers, that he had this event in view, when he tells the Jews, that “the ax is now laid at the root of the tree;” and advises them “to flee from the wrath that was approaching.”

coming of the Lord, of which Elijah, that
 is, the Baptist, was to be the preacher,
 "every valley shall be exalted, and every
 "mountain and hill shall be made low;
 "the crooked shall be made straight, and the
 "rough places plain"—A description, which,
 however it may suit as it does very well, with
 the preparation of men's tempers for the re-
 ception of Christ's Gospel, and the removal
 of such obstacles, as should hinder its propaga-
 tion, yet most remarkably and literally agrees
 with the preparation that was actually made
 for the Roman army, when it advanced, under
 Titus, to the destruction of Jerusalem, as the
 Jewish Historian, Josephus, expressly relates.
 And the Baptist himself sufficiently discovers,
 that he had this event in view, when he tells
 the Jews, that "the ex is now laid at the
 "root of the tree," and advises them "to
 "come from the wrath that was approaching."

S E R M O N C V I I I .

The same Subject continued.

M A T T H E W iii. 13.

*Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan, unto
John, to be baptized of him.*

REPENTANCE was a suitable subject of the Baptist's preaching to the Jews; and this, the Evangelists tell us, he preached with the encouragement of their obtaining remission of their sins, under the ceremony of baptism—a ceremony the Jews were no strangers to, or to the common signification of it, as it implied a profession of laying aside their former manner of life, and entering upon a better; and they did well and wisely who attended to this preaching and baptism. As the Baptist was sent to prepare the way for the coming of Christ, so

the doctrine he preached was preparatory of what Christ was to accomplish ; but did not come up to the full measure of it, for then it would not have been an introduction to Christ's work, but the work itself. Thus the repentance he preached, which consisted in their laying aside their sins, and entering upon a better course of life, was short of that inward renewal to a spiritual life, which Christ works in the heart of the penitent, and which is the gift of his Holy Spirit. The baptism he applied was no more than an external testimony of an inward profession ; but was not yet the sign of a covenant between God and the penitent. The remission of sins, consequent upon John's baptism, was proportionable to the nature of it ; which, being no more than a testimony of men's laying aside their sins, so the remission which followed it, was an exemption of the punishment which was threatened to their sins. Thus the Baptist's work was preparatory only of the work of Christ, who was to compleat what he had begun ; and to whom the Baptist, who well knew his own office and character, refers himself, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him : — “ I indeed baptize you with water
“ unto

“ unto repentance ; but he that cometh after
“ me is mightier than I, he shall baptize you
“ with the Holy Ghost.” Whence it appears, that besides the requisites of repentance and baptism, which John enjoined, there was the farther requisite of faith to attend them ; which, like the others, being preparatory of a higher faith, was at present of an inferior kind. The Baptist, as the Evangelist says of him, “ was not that light, but was sent to bear witness of that light ;” and that faith which is due to a witness, was required in those who attended the Baptist’s preaching. He did not propose himself as the object of their faith ; had he done so, instead of being the harbinger of Christ, he would have supplanted him ; such a faith in John, instead of preparing men for a faith in Christ, would have prevented it : but he told them, there was one coming mightier than he, who should, when he came, be the object of their faith ; and in telling them this, they were to believe him.

To this baptism of John Christ betakes himself. He had hitherto lived in obscurity with his parents at Nazareth, but in perfect innocence, and with strict obedience to that law, which he was come to remove : he did not enter upon his ministry till after a competent

competent time, staying long enough to perform the law, before he set it aside.

But, at the age of about thirty years, he quitted his obscurity, and, intending now to enter upon his ministry, repaired to the banks of Jordan, where John was baptizing, there to take the solemn inauguration into his office, which was intended.

When we consider that Christ was entirely free from sin, and consequently that he had no need of repentance, it is natural to ask, What occasion he had for John's baptism? This thought, we see, was stirring in the Baptist's mind—when he said to Christ, “I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?” To which Christ replies, “Suffer it to be so now; for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.” The baptism of John was of Divine appointment: the observance of which, therefore, was obligatory on those, before whom it was set: it was set before the Jews; and Christ complied with it as a Jew, not as a repentant sinner. Having performed all other righteousness, and complied with every other institution, he would not omit this; that he, who was come to remove the transgressions of others, might bring with him none of his own:

own: and very suitably did Christ concur in giving his testimony to the use of an institution, which was appointed to prepare men for what he himself was coming to do and to teach; and the more so, as this circumstance of being baptized himself, would hereafter more strongly dignify the baptism which he thought fit to enjoin his followers.

But the great and immediate use of Christ's having recourse to John's baptism was, that he might thereby receive the Divine testimony of his character and business.

This he had in a very remarkable manner: for, when he was come up out of the water, and whilst he was devoutly engaged in prayer, the heavens opened, and the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape, like a dove, upon him; and there came a voice from heaven, saying—"Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Such was the appearance which attended the baptism of Christ; when the heavens opened, to proclaim that ministry, the business of which was to open heaven to mankind. And thus did the three persons of the Holy Trinity, each in his proper symbol, concur in setting forth that salvation, which they had decreed from the beginning of the world;

world; the Father, in the voice which was delivered; the Son, in human flesh; and the Holy Ghost, in the appearance of the dove.

The Holy Spirit's descending like a dove, is remarkable. The dove was the bird which Noah sent out from the ark, and which, returning with an olive leaf, brought him the joyful assurance that the flood and the anger of God was abated; that the earth was recovering its fertility, and man his security and peace. This bird, which was thus the messenger of reconciliation, and of the reparation of the earth, is represented as attending upon the baptism of Christ, and most fitly indicates the reconciliation and reparation of man, which that baptism introduced; nor did it less fitly indicate the qualities of that Divine person on whom it lighted, whose human soul the Holy Spirit of God had, from his birth, inspired with meekness, innocence, simplicity, and love; and now, by this external appearance, gave a public testimony of its work, and proclaimed it to the world. When God is pleased to give external representations or symbols of his blessings, we may be well assured of their propriety. The dove, which hovered over the head of Christ, fitly represented the innocent meekness of his ministry and life, as the fiery tongues, which afterwards

afterwards fell on the Apostles, represented the fervor of their ministry, in preaching the Gospel to the world.

The voice from heaven, on this occasion, was highly solemn and important—"Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." This Divine testimony to the character of Christ, satisfies us whom we have for the author of our salvation; who he was who was come down from heaven, and was now entering upon that gracious ministry, by which he would lead mankind thither. The Son of God; the beloved Son of God; the Son in whom he was well pleased—As if, by thus earnestly expressing his own love for Christ, God would as earnestly recommend him to the love and adoration of mankind; and, at the same time, as earnestly assure them of the salvation he was come to work.

This deserves our serious consideration, as it is the great support of our religious hope and obedience. However unable we may be to comprehend, yet we may well rely on the testimony of God for believing our Saviour's Divinity, and should be cautious how we make light of so important an article of our faith: for, if the author of our salvation be not God, "our faith is vain, and we are yet in
" our

“our sins.” For what is our faith, but our redemption from the guilt and punishment of sin? and, what is that redemption worth, if man, if any created being, hath wrought it? If the laws of God’s dominion be violated, if the Majesty of Heaven be offended, no subject of God’s dominion, wherever placed, can repair that violation, or atone for the offence. No man, no creature, can make atonement unto God for himself, much less for others. Either, therefore, men are not aware what they are doing, when they make light of Christ’s divinity, or they are desperately disposed; since, by setting aside Christ’s divinity, they set aside man’s redemption; and, if the redemption which the Gospel holds forth to us be set aside, what becomes of the obedience and the hopes which are expressly placed upon it? It is the comfortable assurance we have, that the Son of God is our redeemer, and our mediator, that sets us at work with our obedience; and the hope, which he hath given us, that supports us in it—the hope of heaven, which no created being can dispose of, and which the Son of the God of heaven hath set before us. Moses, the greatest prophet among men, under the direction of God, could lead the Israelites out of their Egyptian bondage

2

into

into the land of Canaan ; but it must be one greater than Moses who can deliver mankind from the bondage of sin, and conduct them to heaven. Accordingly we find, that when Christ, at his baptism, was entering upon this greater work, and God was pleased to give testimony to his character, he is dignified by a much higher title than was ever given to Moses :—of Moses, God said, “ He is my “ servant ;” but of Christ, he says, “ Thou “ art my Son :” and of their miracles, which doubtless are the work of God, it is observable, that God wrought them by the hand of Moses, as his instrument, which was sufficient for proving his Divine mission ; but Christ wrought them himself ; which goes higher, and amounts to a proof of his Divine nature.

This testimony, which God was pleased to give of Christ's dignity, at his entrance upon his ministry, he was afterwards pleased to repeat, during his discharge of it, at the transfiguration on the mount ; where he confirms not only his title, but the business he came upon—“ This is my beloved Son, in whom “ I am well pleased ; hear ye him :” and, surely, recommended as he was by such testimonials from the God of heaven, and commissioned as he was with no less a business than
the

the salvation of mankind, he most highly deserves to be heard. It was not a Socrates or a Plato, it was not a prophet, whom God thus commands men to hear and attend to ; but it was his only begotten and beloved Son.—As if God should say, ‘ He whom I have sent among you from my bosom, shall best inform you of my will : he who is the Son of my Nature, shall best remove the guilt and punishment of your sins ; and, the “ Son, in “ whom I am well pleased,” shall best reconcile me to mankind : he shall shew you the way to righteousness and to life ; he shall teach you your duty here, and bring you to the happiness of my kingdom in heaven hereafter.’

Let us then diligently hear him ; and not only hear, but honour him. When we reflect on the solemn testimony which the voice of God gave to the dignity of Christ, let us take care how we refuse him the adoration that is due to him. When God hath asserted Christ’s Divinity, and said to him, “ Thou “ art my Son,” consider what it is to deny that Divinity, and to tell God, He is not thy Son.—The sophistry of man will never support his impiety in contradicting God ; and, when Christ, from his tribunal, shall hereafter ask such men, why they have refused him
the

the honour due to his Divinity, they will hardly have the courage to answer—Because we did not *think* it due to you.

And let us not only hear and honour; but let us love and obey this only begotten and beloved Son of God. When we reflect on the solemnity with which his ministry was opened, we cannot forget the design with which it was opened, or think on both, without thinking on ourselves, and how we ought to behave in consequence of what God, his Son, and his Holy Spirit, have done for our salvation. It will little avail us to honour the Son of God for the ministry he undertook on our behalf, if we do not heartily join our best endeavours for promoting the end for which he undertook it; as he has given us the means, we must be diligent and sincere in applying them for our salvation; otherwise, the greater his glory at his entrance upon his ministry, the greater will be our confusion at his entrance upon his tribunal, should we be found unfruitful under the instructions he gave us, and unworthy of the redemption he wrought for us.

S E R M O N C I X.

ON THE MINISTRY OF JESUS CHRIST.

JOHN i. 17.

The law was given by Moses ; but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

THE design of the Baptist's ministry was to introduce Christ : the design of Christ's ministry was to introduce grace and truth. The Baptist, beside the general testimony he gave of Christ, that he should be one mightier than he, testifies more particularly of him, in what respects he should be mightier : " I," says he, " baptize with water ; but there standeth one among you, " who shall baptize with the Holy Ghost : " — " I exhort you to repent of your sins ; but behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world ! "

The ministry of Christ, as it was introduced by that of the Baptist, so it is distin-

guished, in my text, from the ministry of Moses, and that too with a mark of preference: "The law was given by Moses; but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."

By the law here, is meant that part of the Jewish religion which was delivered to them by Moses upon Mount Sinai:—I say, that part of the Jewish religion; because the law given upon Mount Sinai was not the whole of the Jewish religion, properly so called. The covenant, which God made with Abraham, was made before the law, and subsisted under the law; and the purport of this covenant was, justification by faith in that person who should hereafter bring with him an universal blessing, to recover mankind from the universal curse, which had passed upon them at the fall. "This covenant," as the Apostle expressly says, "which was before confirmed of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, could not disannul." It was therefore subsisting, in its full force, with and under the law given by Moses; and, whether it was much or little attended to, was a very material part, nay, was the true foundation of the Jewish religion. "The law," as the Apostle farther says, "was added because of transgressions;" that

that is, it was given, as well for other reasons, as because it would be a means of shewing men their proneness to sin, by their frequent transgressions of it; and, consequently, of preparing them for the acceptance of Christ's Gospel, which was to bring with it the remission of their sins. Men must first be convinced they are sinners, before they feel themselves disposed to ask pardon of their sins; and what more natural method to convince them they are sinners, than to give them a law, and let them try what they can do in yielding a due obedience to it? It is true, they had already the law of reason within them; but, perhaps, the breaches of a positive law, consisting of external ordinances, are more determinate and convincing than the breaches of the inward law of our own reason; which we are too apt to dissemble, if not to justify.

The law given by the ministry of Moses upon Mount Sinai, it is well known, consisted of precepts or statutes which were moral, ceremonial, and political: and this system of statutes, considered as delivered by Moses, is meant by the law, as we meet with that expression in the Gospels; though in the Epistles the same expression has somewhat a different meaning; where it implies only the

ceremonial part of this system, and that too considered in opposition to the reformation or removal of them, which Christ had introduced; which opposition, we know, gave the Apostles much trouble in their preaching the Gospel.

It is in the former of these senses, that the text before us says, "The law was given by "Moses" (that is, the whole Jewish law) "but "grace and truth came by Jesus Christ:"—where, as I have observed, a comparison is hinted between the law of Moses and the Gospel of Christ; and the preference is given to the latter, on this account, that "grace and "truth" were introduced by it. From whence, however, we are not to conclude any thing to the disparagement of the law of Moses; which was manifestly of Divine original, and therefore undoubtedly true; and, considering the great use and design of it, was an extraordinary instance of Divine grace and favour to the Jewish people in particular, and to mankind in general. Its use and design was to point at that very salvation which the Gospel of Christ introduced; and so far has the same worth with the Gospel itself, as it has the same object for its ultimate end, and proceeds from the same author: I say the

same author, because, in truth, it was the same Son of God who set forth both the law and the Gospel; the former, by the ministration of Moses, the latter, in his own person, and incarnate: and a very material point of preference this is, which the Gospel has above the law, and which carries in it the highest demonstration of Divine grace towards man—that the Son of God, who forsook not his glory to set forth the law, forsook it to set forth the Gospel; which he did not deliver in the terrors of Divine majesty, as on Mount Sinai; but condescended to deliver it in the humility of our own nature.

The law of Moses, though it had the same author, and the same ultimate end in view that the Gospel of Christ has (and so far was upon an equality of merit with it) yet, being appointed for introducing Christ's Gospel, it must, in the very nature of it, be inferior to that to which it served as an introduction, as every subordinate means is naturally inferior to the end it serves. But, more particularly,

1. The law being, as the Apostle styles it, but “the shadow of things to come,” and setting forth only the emblematical representation of what was to be really fulfilled

under the Gospel, must needs be as much inferior to the Gospel, both in dignity and truth, as the shadow is inferior to the substance, or as a promise is to the accomplishment of it : a promise must needs be inferior in truth to the accomplishment, because it is the accomplishment alone which makes a promise true ; and this shews the right meaning of the expression in my text, that “ truth came by Jesus Christ :” where truth is to be understood, not in opposition to falsehood ; for the law of Moses was as true as the Gospel of Christ ; but in opposition to a promise or representation going before ; which promise the law contains and the Gospel accomplishes.—Our Saviour says, he “ came not to destroy the law, but to fulfil it.” This declaration reaches over the whole law, as delivered by Moses. To fulfil is either to accomplish, if it refers to any thing prophetically delivered ; or to perfect, if it refers to any thing which admits of improvement. In the former sense, Christ fulfilled the ceremonial part of the law, which being typical, and preparatory to his work in the salvation of man, was truly prophetic of it ; and, consequently, was accomplished by the performance of it. In the latter sense, he fulfilled the moral part of the law, as he improved

proved it by more distinct precepts, and by sublimer promises, as well as stronger assistance in the discharge of it: but he destroyed nothing; he did not destroy the ceremonial part of the law, any more than he destroyed the ancient prophecies which foretold his coming; they were *accomplished*, not *destroyed*: and, for the political part of the law, that being calculated to support and distinguish the Jews as a peculiar nation, and that national system and distinction being instituted to serve a particular purpose, namely, the introduction of Christ; when that purpose was answered, the national distinction was no longer of use; and that falling, the peculiar laws which supported it, fell with it; and can no more be said to be destroyed, than any human law is said to be so, when it has answered the purpose for which it was made. It is obsolete, it ceases; but is not opposed and destroyed.

2. The law being, as the Apostle styles it, "the ministration of death and condemnation," (2 Cor. iii. 7, 9.) challenging an exact obedience, and denouncing a curse upon transgression, must needs be inferior in point of grace to the Gospel, which proposes remission of sins to the penitent. The law required
sinless,

sinless, but the Gospel accepts sincere, obedience; which, though imperfect, is made acceptable to God through the satisfaction of Christ. Under the Gospel men are not so much obnoxious for offending, as for continuing obstinate in their offences: and mercy is now denied, not for sin committed, but for persisting in sin without repentance. This is a great difference between the law and the Gospel, and makes the former as much inferior to the latter as death is to life, as condemnation is to pardon. And here, likewise, we are to observe, that when it is said, "Grace came by Jesus Christ," the word *grace* is to be understood, not in opposition to the want of God's grace, or his regard towards man; which was conspicuous enough in the appointment of the law, since, though the law did not itself give life, it was appointed to introduce what did; and, therefore, *grace* here is to be understood in opposition to *condemnation*, which the law of Moses did not provide against; but for which there is an effectual remedy provided in the Gospel of Christ.

3. We may observe farther, that the system of laws given by Moses, though it had a distant view to the coming of Christ, yet was immediately intended for the restraint and government

vernment of a rebellious and obstinate people; it was a system of laws set up for the government of the Jewish state; and therefore, like other political laws, was directed to the outward acts of obedience, more than to the inward disposition of the heart; but the law of Christ's Gospel is of a different kind, calculated, not for political government, but for the government of our affections and dispositions. And this design of Christ's law was long since pointed out, even whilst the law of Moses was subsisting. For thus God spake by his prophet Jeremiah—"Behold the days
" come, that I will make a new covenant
" with the house of Israel, and with the house
" of Judah; not according to the covenant
" that I made with their fathers in the day
" that I took them by the hand to bring
" them out of the land of Egypt; but this
" shall be the covenant that I will make with
" them—I will put my law in their in-
" ward parts, and write it in their hearts."
(*Jer.* xxxi. 31.) This prophecy is quoted and applied by St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Hebrews; and therefore we cannot be mistaken in understanding it as spoken of Christ's Gospel; which is thus plainly set forth as a law, not of outward ordinances, but for the inward

inward disposition of the heart.—Our obedience and righteousness, under the law of Christ, is, as the Apostle calls it, “a reasonable service;” not that obedience to the law of Moses was an unreasonable service; for God had commanded it; but our righteousness is chiefly the employment of our reasonable faculties, and not so much the labour of our bodies, as was the righteousness of the Jews, which was busied about so many and so burdensome external ceremonies. And yet, perhaps, it may be suggested, that our spiritual obedience, if it be more reasonable, is also more difficult, than the observance of ordinances. It is true:—and moreover, we are always to remember, that though the rigour of the law be abated under the Gospel, yet the Evangelical obedience is stricter than that under the law—“Except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven,” says our Saviour. But then consider, we have greater assistance in the performance of it. “The ministration of the Spirit attends the law of the Spirit:” and, if the dispensation under which we live, surpasses all other dispensations, we are strengthened to perform what is required of us in a manner

manner as far surpassing what was administered in former dispensations. That important help to obedience and holiness, which we derive from the Spirit of God in our hearts, is a very material part of that grace which came by Jesus Christ. This help is expressly promised in the Gospel, and is not promised in the law of Moses; which, therefore, on this account, is as much inferior to the Gospel, as the knowledge of a law is inferior to the ability of performing it. This is a material improvement in the Gospel above the law; and it were well if those who profess to live under the Gospel, would be careful to shew an improvement in their behaviour, suitable to the law they live under, and the assistance which is offered them for living up to it.

4. In the fourth and last place, we may observe, that the Gospel hath this preference above the law of Moses, that it hath a much greater extent, and is founded on a much greater promises. The law of Moses was national, confined to the Jews only; the Gospel of Christ is universal; and, according to the command he gave his disciples, "goes into all the world, and teaches all nations." The law of Moses was supported on temporal rewards in the present life: the Gospel of Christ proposes an eternal reward in the life to come; not

not excluding, but much promoting, in the mean time, the true happiness of the present.

It is true, indeed, that good men, under the law, did look for more than temporary promises; but this is no objection to what is here asserted, that the promise of eternal life belongs peculiarly to the Gospel: for the comparison we have been considering lies between the law of Moses and the Gospel of Christ; but this hope of a better state, which good men had under the law, they derived not from the law of Moses, but from the religion delivered down to them from Abraham; which attended the law of Moses, and was the only spiritual support of it. From hence the fathers drew their hopes of a better life after this, not from the law of Moses, which, as it was limited to the people of the Jews, so was it limited to the present life. Yet even with respect to this *hope*, which good men of old derived from the religion of Abraham, when it is compared with the *certainty* of eternal life, as expressly set forth in the Gospel of Christ, the latter must surely be allowed to have made, though not the *first* discovery, yet the first promise, and the *fullest* discovery of it.

It is true, likewise, that, according to the present state of the Gospel, it is not universally professed

professed in the world; but neither is this any objection to what is here asserted of its extent over all nations. Scripture assures us it *shall* overspread the world; but it has not told us *when*: and the circumstance, that there are still many nations not illuminated by it, is no more an objection now, than it was at first, when only the land of Judea enjoyed it. The blessings of Providence are gradual; and God hath his own times in his own hands. One thing we are sure of, that the purposes and promises of God cannot fail; and, however gradual the knowledge of the Gospel may be before it covers the earth, yet the salvation purchased by the sacrifice of Christ, as it was purchased for all men, will reach to all men who do not disqualify themselves for it. He was "the Lamb slain from the beginning of the world," and will be so to the end of it: his interposition in favour of man took effect before he was known on earth, and will do so where he is unknown. His merits are not limited by place and time; and (which is a matter worthy our most serious attention) those who have never known him, may be saved by him, whilst those who have known him, but have despised him, shall certainly be rejected.

S E R M O N

provided in the world; but which is this
 position to what a first attempt of its extent
 on the nations. But this argues us it well
 extended the world; but it has not told us
 what, and the circumstance, that there are
 many things not intended by it, is so
 that in order now, then it was at all,
 when only the first of Jacob was at it. The
 world of history and nature; and God
 with his own voice in his own hands. One
 thing we are sure of, that the world is all
 in order of God cannot be, however
 great the knowledge of the world may be
 as it is now, the world is the situation
 of the world by the nature of it, as it was
 intended for all men, well teach to all men
 with no more than themselves for it. The
 world is the world from the beginning of
 the world, and will be to the end of it;
 the world is the world of men took care
 of it, and was given on earth, and will do so
 to the end of the world. The world is the
 world by the nature of it, and (which is a
 great world) but not to the end of it. The
 world is the world, and will be to the end of it;
 the world is the world, and will be to the end of it;
 the world is the world, and will be to the end of it;

S E R M O N CX.

CHRIST'S PREDICTION OF HIS SUFFER-
INGS AND DEATH.

J O H N xiii. 19.

*Now I tell you before it come, that when it is
come to pass, ye may believe that I am he.*

THE design of our Saviour's preaching was not to open at once the whole purport of his dispensation; but gradually to prepare men for it, by improving their notions of the moral law, and withdrawing them from their attachment to their present teachers, the Scribes and Pharisees. Agreeably to this purpose, our Saviour delivered himself in parables; under which he covertly set forth the nature, design, and progress of the dispensation he was come to establish; which parables he did not explain to the rulers and people, because they were not worthy of them;

but he explained them to his disciples, because it was to be their business to preach and explain them to others.

Thus far our Saviour acquitted himself like a wise and able teacher ; but there is an observation, which will farther shew, that he was a teacher “ sent from God ;” and that he was the Messiah : and this is, that, in his preaching, he delivered himself, not only in parables, but in prophecy.

One material instance of this prophetic spirit, which Jesus shewed in his preaching, was, that he discovered a knowledge of the hearts of men. This is a circumstance in our Saviour's preaching, which a reader is apt to pass over inattentively, or, however, without feeling that attention to it, which they must have felt, to whom he was speaking. Such knowledge is, doubtless, a privilege peculiar to God, or to those whom God peculiarly inspires with it. The woman of Samaria at once concluded Jesus to be the Messiah, because he so truly told her “ all things that ever she “ did.” The conclusion was a natural one ; and yet, it was possible that a stranger, as Jesus then appeared to her, might, in the natural way of information, have come at the knowledge of her domestic history, and have surprised

surprized her with the like exact account of it: the conclusion, therefore, is much stronger for the Divine mission of him, who shews that he is acquainted, not only with past facts, but with the present thoughts of men; which our Saviour shewed in many instances; and the discovery he made of this knowledge was well adapted for enforcing his doctrine of sincerity, and serving God in spirit and in truth; since his hearers were hereby convinced, that the inspection of Christ would follow his doctrine, and that he would judge of that sincerity and purity which he enjoined. Nor was this knowledge of the heart less suitably adapted for attending another part of the prophetic faculty, which distinguished the preaching of our Saviour, and which shewed itself in foretelling future events. A knowledge of the heart, and a knowledge of future events, are both prerogatives of Divinity; and, where the former evidently shews itself attending upon prophetic declarations of future events, it establishes the credit of such declarations; since it requires not a greater power to know future events, than it does to know the thoughts of the heart; and therefore, if we are satisfied of the one, we may well believe the other.

The parables of our Saviour were, indeed, a sort of prophecy, so far as they set forth the future events belonging to his dispensation ; but there were other instances in his preaching, which more directly fall under that denomination.

He foretold his own passion, death, and resurrection, at first obscurely and in figure ; but afterwards more plainly, as the time approached. But all this was so contrary to what his disciples expected of the Messiah, that " they understood it not." And our Saviour himself, when he foretold these things to them, shewed, that he did not expect his predictions should have so much a present effect upon them, as a distant one hereafter—" Now " I tell you," says he, " before it come to " pass" (he does not add, that ye may be assured it will come to pass, but) " that when " it is come to pass, ye may believe."—The effect of his predictions was not to confirm their present expectations, but their future faith ; and the intent of Jesus, in delivering them, was, not that the disciples should now look forward from his predictions to the event, but that they should hereafter look backward from the event to the predictions ; that so they might be convinced, that he who
had

had so accurately foretold what had happened, was truly the Messiah; and might learn, that the event itself, however surprizing and melancholy, was not merely the effect of men's malice, but an event of God's appointment; —a lesson, which would hereafter be of singular use to them; since, in consequence of their conviction, that it was an event of God's appointment, they would feel this farther assurance, that God, who will never forsake his own appointments, would infallibly support them under it.

Two things more especially Jesus set before them, relative to his approaching death and sufferings; namely, the necessity of it, and the benefit arising from it. These important points the disciples did not understand till afterwards; at present they received what Jesus said upon them, as hints of something melancholy, which was to happen to him, they knew not what, and which they did not care to think of.

Thus, when some of the Gentiles, who were come to the passover, were desirous of seeing him, he made this reply;—"The hour
" is come, that the Son of man should be
" glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you,
" Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground

“ and die, it abideth alone ; but if it die, it
“ bringeth forth much fruit.” (*John* xii. 24.)
—This similitude is well adapted for pointing
at the necessity and the benefits of Christ’s death.
There were points, which Jesus had then full
before him ; which supported his own human
nature against what he saw approaching, and
which he sets forth in this familiar manner to
his disciples for their support, when they
should come to understand its meaning.

A grain of wheat must be sown in the
earth, and die, in order to bring forth fruit:
and Christ must suffer death, in order to work
the salvation of man.

The necessity, in both cases, rests upon the
appointment of God, who hath thought fit
so to order it. If we carry our enquiry far-
ther, we seek not wisely ; and if, because we
cannot satisfy our enquiry beyond this point,
we will not be satisfied with what lies within
it, we act madly. God hath so thought fit to
appoint, that Christ should take human nature
upon him, and suffer death, to procure the sal-
vation of man ; this once appointed by the
will of God, and Christ having voluntarily
condescended to become man for this purpose,
it was necessary he should suffer death to ac-
complish it ;—necessary, in consequence of the
Divine

Divine appointment—no other necessity can we reach. To ask what necessity there was for this, previous to the Divine appointment of it; what that fitness was, which determined God to this method of man's salvation, is surely carrying our enquiry too far. It is true, we are creatures endued with reason; but this, surely, does not give us a right to ask God what questions we please about his conduct, and to have our questions answered. Sensible, sober men, expect not this from earthly kings—What then are they who insist upon it from the King of Heaven? and, because they are disappointed, disown his government, and blaspheme his name!

He would not deserve an answer, who should ask a reason why God hath so ordered it, that corn should not grow unless it be sown; but, what should we think of him, who, because nobody could give him a satisfactory answer to such silly question, should reject the bounty of God, and refuse to sow his corn? The infidel, indeed, might help him to one of his arguments—and tell him—that his grain might have produced its fruit a better way, without the trouble and expence of tilling, plowing, and sowing; and that, as a wise God must order all things in the best and

shortest way, this order for sowing, &c. can be no order of his, but is all an imposition.—But this fine argument, as it would not keep the husbandman from starving, so neither would it help him to pity, if he does.

Our Saviour's conduct in this matter shews us a rule for our reasoning upon it—"Not my will, but thine be done." Our Saviour knew, what we in vain demand to know—the secret counsels of God; from what reasons in the Divine mind his own voluntary proposal, and God's appointment, of this method for man's salvation proceeded; yet we find him, in his human nature, reasoning up no higher than the Divine appointment: that necessity of his death, which was consequent to the will and appointment of God, was all he took to support his conduct in meeting it; he had no recourse to any reasons of necessity, previous to the appointment; and, if this was sufficient for our Saviour's conduct, it should be sufficient for our judgment,

SERMON

S E R M O N CXI.

THE PASSION OF OUR SAVIOUR.

J O H N xii. 24.

Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.

I Have observed, that Jesus, in his preaching, delivered himself, not only in parables, but in prophecy; and, that he prophesied his own death and sufferings; setting forth the necessity of it, and the benefit arising from it, and placing the necessity of it on the will and appointment of God.

We come now to attend the accomplishment of what was thus divinely appointed. And here Jesus compleated his character; shewing himself to be not only a teacher, but a Redeemer: others before him had taught, others had prophesied; but no one before him,

him, or after him, ever died for the salvation, not only of those he taught, but of all mankind.

The death, which he saw approaching, was a cup of bitterness; which, though he had voluntarily proposed to drink, yet, when he now saw it set before him, in his father's hand, he shuddered at the draught. (*John xii. 27.*)—"Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say?" No wonder he was troubled, since "in all things he was made like unto us his brethren, sin only excepted." As he took our nature, so he took our feelings upon him; and, as he could thence judge of our infirmities, so may we judge what was his state of mind, when the terrors of death were before him, and advancing to lay hold of him.

But, though the human nature of Christ felt this human astonishment, yet he could look through that gloom of horror which surrounded him; and, beyond it, see the glory of God, and the salvation of man, accruing from his death: the sight of which supported his spirits; and his divine purposes outweighed his human feelings.

His mind was full of these thoughts, when he said, "Except a corn of wheat fall into
" the

“ the ground and die, it abideth alone ; but
“ if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.”—
Mark the similitude ! As if it was not humility sufficient, that the Son of God condescended to take human nature upon him, he condescends still lower, and compares himself to a grain of corn.

Indeed the whole course of his life, from his manger to his cross, well suits the similitude. Nothing could be more humble. If we consider his mere human condition, nothing could be less respectable:—born in a stable, brought up with a carpenter, and, when grown up, associating with fishermen ; wandering from place to place, and, as he himself declares, “ not having where to lay his head.” There was nothing in this sufficient to raise any notice of him, much less to gain him any respect ; nay, so far was his mere human condition from raising him any reputation, that it served to depress even that which arose from the Divine power belonging to him.—Poverty at home, pinches reputation abroad :—if our Saviour found it so, who will be angry that he does not find it otherwise ?

Such was his poverty, so little did his human condition afford, that we find him often obliged to have recourse to his Divine
power

power for his own subsistence, and the subsistence of those about him ; and he wrought miracles to come at his meal, and to pay his tribute. And so low was his estimation, in consequence of his poverty, that the Jews rejected his preaching with this taunt—"Is not this the carpenter's son?" And for his pretensions to be the Messiah—rather than admit one of his mean appearance, they set themselves against prophecies, which they held to be divine ; and, rather than own his works to be the works of God, ascribed them to the devil.

So low was the human condition of Christ—so low did he lay the foundation of that church he was building upon earth, which was to reach up to heaven, and to stand for ever! a building, which, as it arose from such apparently mean beginnings, and is growing to such height and extent, discovers its builder to be God, as it carries in it the evident marks of that workmanship, which made all things out of nothing.

The church he intended to build, the salvation he was come to procure, was to be founded in his blood ; and the humility of his life was a natural step to the death he was appointed to suffer: yet, however natural a step it was,

was, his disciples, who were the constant companions of his humility, expected not his death, which, notwithstanding the many notices he gave them of it, was as surprizing to them as it was melancholy.

His disciples, when they saw their master thoughtful, fixed, and troubled, and heard him delivering himself in gloomy presages of sufferings and of death, were naturally filled with fears, and disposed to sympathize with him: they observed, and, by observing, caught his melancholy; and attended him, in his own dress of mind, to the amazing, troublous scene, which he already saw before him, and which was now ready to be opened to their view.

But here we must remove ourselves from our present situation; at this distance of time, and place ourselves along with the disciples around our Saviour, in order to view this scene as they did. For, we are to remember, they then saw no more than the sowing of this grain of wheat; but we know its growth and fruitfulness; we therefore are supplied with sentiments, in reflecting upon this event, which could not occur to their minds in viewing it before them; as, on the other hand, they felt emotions in their breasts on

this occasion, which we do not feel, but which we may well imagine.

They loved and followed him as their master and teacher; but knew him not yet as their Redeemer: or, if “they hoped, that it “was he who should redeem Israel,” they thought only of a temporal redemption, and never suspected that he should redeem them by his death; much less did they suspect, that by his death he was to work the spiritual redemption of mankind.

The thoughts of these honest plain companions of our Saviour, on this melancholy occasion, arose from the relation he bore to them, as being their master, and from a faith, that he was come from God, and that he was the Christ. Their love for him as their master, raised all the tender passions in their breasts; and their faith in him, as the Christ, without abating those passions, filled them with astonishment. And thus the scene, which we reflect upon with gratitude, they saw with grief; and, what is matter of comfort and admiration to us, to them was matter of the greatest anguish, fear, and consternation.

It must be so—for they could not but feel anguish, when their master, whom they loved, whose constant business, they knew, had been

to

to "go about doing good," was thus cruelly treated. Compassion for him, resentment against his enemies, were natural emotions of the heart; which, on this occasion, they must feel, as they were men; much more as they were honest men; most of all, as they were his friends. And this compassion and resentment, which they naturally felt, would as naturally grow up into anguish, when they reflected, that those were his persecutors, who only had the power to protect him, and that themselves were nothing able to restrain them.

For, what could these poor fishermen do, with their honest and affectionate hearts only, against the rude hands and cruel hearts of the grandees of Jerusalem? men advanced to the station of nobility, dignity, and power; a station, where, if those who are placed in it, do not feel themselves like men, those who are beneath them are sure to feel them worse than brutes, and as sure to esteem them so.

With this resentment against the rulers, the disciples likewise felt a fear for themselves; and their own thoughts now suggested, what their master before had told them—that, if he fared ill, they must not expect to fare better. — These companions of Jesus, though they were honest affectionate disciples, still
were

were men ; and, as the horror of the melancholy scene advanced upon them, their courage was too weak to stand it—" they forsook him and fled."——On which we may observe, that they were but a very inconsiderable number ; and, as human prudence withheld them from attempting an impracticable work, so Divine wisdom did not think fit to qualify them for an improper one : Divine assistance, afterwards, was eminently administered in supplying them with courage against the greatest difficulties, when the Gospel of their master was to be promoted ; but here it was withheld, where his sufferings and death were not to be prevented. And their fear, however chargeable upon them as a weakness, was not only natural, but seems providentially designed ; the ill usage their beloved master met with in the high-priest's hall, had been too much for them, and Providence kindly permitted their fears to draw them from the sight of it.—Peter, indeed, had the courage to attempt it, but not to stand it : his conduct, however, served to supply a fine lesson against confidence ; and the finest picture of Divine tenderness and human remorse, when, upon the crowing of the cock, Jesus cast a look upon Peter—which
Peter

Peter not only saw, but felt—and immediately “went out, and wept bitterly.”

If the preparatory steps, in this dismal transaction, filled the disciples with fear, what must they think of its conclusion? With the notions and expectations they had about them, what could they think! They saw a man condemned to death, who was so far from having done any thing worthy of death, that his whole behaviour had been a continued course of innocence and goodness. To see such a man suffering death, with all the ignominy belonging to the worst of malefactors, who had been so great a benefactor, who had wrought so many miracles for the relief of the people, must be matter of consternation—how or why all this should be, was a question they could not yet answer, notwithstanding their master’s intimations about it: and greater still must be their consternation, when they saw the Christ, whom they expected to be immortal, hanging breathless on the cross.

From whence, when they had taken him down, and were carrying him to his grave, how natural, but at the same time how perplexing was the reflection, which must then arise in their minds—that he, who had shewn so many instances of his Divine power for

the relief of others, should be destitute of all power for his own defence!—that he, who had saved others from dying—had called back others to life, who were already dead—and who had raised Lazarus even from the grave—that he should be thus carried to the grave himself!

With these perplexities, which, when added to their grief for the loss of him they loved, filled up the measure of their anguish, they laid this precious grain of wheat in the earth; yet not with the husbandman's confidence of seeing it spring up again, and bring forth fruit; but, burying their master and their hopes together, they turned from the sepulchre, and departed, sorrowing, to their homes.

With whatever sorrowful thoughts they turned from the sepulchre, after paying this last duty to their master, we may turn from the contemplation of it with reflections of comfort; since in that sepulchre was buried the anger of God, and condemnation of man. The death of Christ, on behalf of sinful man, satisfied the Divine justice, and has left the way open to the Divine mercy; by repentance, and a love of him who thus graciously died to redeem us, to replace us in our duty.

duty and our way to eternal happiness. Without Christ's interposition on our behalf, we wanted power to save ourselves; but after what he hath done, if we are lost, it will be for want of our own care. So much hath been done—so much love for us hath the Father shewn in sending his Son, and the Son in condescending to come down, for our salvation, that we shall never be able to look up for shame, if it shall appear that we have loved ourselves less than God and his Son hath loved us; still worse, if we have opposed our hatred to their love; and have ungratefully repaid their care with our neglect, if not with our contempt. But, if we love ourselves, if we feel any desire for happiness, or any inclination to follow the means which lead to it, let us remember, that Christ, by his death, hath opened our way; hath removed that condemnation which obstructed our passage; and invites us to set forward. Repentance is a natural work, if we but seriously ask ourselves what we are; love of Christ is unavoidable, if we as seriously reflect on what he hath done for us;—his commandments are not grievous, and his reward is certain.

and our way to eternal happiness. 27
 and Christ's sacrifice on our behalf, we
 wanted power to love, obey, and
 what he had done for us, but it will be
 for want of our own love. So much love
 is required to enable us to love him, and
 love him in love to him, and the Son
 in obedience to him, and let our love
 be such, that we shall never be able to look
 up for him, if in itself, appear that we have
 a real affection for him, and his Son, and
 love him with all our heart, we have opened
 our hearts to him, and will have un-
 fully repaid them with our neglect, if not
 with our contempt. But if we have
 in us, we feel any desire for happiness, or any in-
 clination to follow the means which lead to
 it, let us remember, that Christ by his death,
 hath opened our way, hath removed the
 obstacles which opposed our passage,
 and in us to let forward. Repentance is
 a natural work, if we but seriously ask our-
 selves what we may for Christ, it is un-
 avoidable, if we are truly sorry for what he hath
 done for us, and our commandments are not
 grievous, and have a true desire to love
 him, and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

O 3. SERMON

S E R M O N CXII.

ON ANGER.

EPHESIANS iv. 26.

Be ye angry, and sin not.

WE are not to suppose that the Apostle here enjoins, or even recommends, anger. The sentence, indeed, seems to consist of two parts; the one mandatory, "Be angry;" the other prohibitory, "Sin not:" but they are both resolvable into this one plain prohibitory advice—When you are angry, take care you do not sin.

It must needs be, that provocations fall in our way. They may be necessary in the human system, to set our virtue at work; as a due fermentation is necessary, for the promotion of the natural system. But, without nicely enquiring into this point, or examining how far, and on what occasions, anger may be allowable, this is clear, that on no

occasion we should suffer the misbehaviour of others to destroy our own duty. The Apostle enters not into the causes of anger, but points at the consequences of it, and advises that moderation of temper, with which we should govern every emotion of it, under any provocation we may meet with, lest, however justifiable it may be in its cause, it prove sinful and mischievous in its consequences.

In the government of this, as in the government of all the passions, recourse must be had to reason and religion. Such, indeed, as are naturally cool and moderate in their temper, have easier work to do in confining their anger within due bounds; but those who are otherwise, have not harder work than they are able to do, if they will take reason and religion to their aid, and, instead of indulging their anger, because they feel it natural, will endeavour to restrain it, because it may prove sinful.

The first step towards restraining anger, is to stop the source from whence this sort of temper flows.

Men are apt to plead natural constitution, as the source from whence flows their warmth of temper and immoderate anger; so they do for other vices belonging to human nature:

bu,

but, however natural constitution may heighten this malady, the true source of it, perhaps, lies deeper still, and springs more from the moral than the natural constitution.

Immoderate anger seems to spring from pride, as moderation of temper does from humility. Without going into a philosophic enquiry upon this point, look among mankind, and see, if proud men are not generally passionate, and humble men not so easily, or so far, provoked. It is true, we often see those persons very passionate and warm, in whom we discover nothing to be proud of; but it is not what we discover, but what they feel, which feeds their pride; — they may be proud of their own fancy. The objects of pride are innumerable and unaccountable; so that, though many different causes may operate to occasion anger, yet, when we see a man in a violent passion, could we examine his heart, it is a great chance but we should find, that he feels his pride touched in some point or other. Nor does it destroy this observation, that we see men passionate on matters that do not concern themselves; their qualifications, though not their interest, may be concerned; and a mere opposition of opinion, as it arraigns their judgment, is too

frequently sufficient to blow up the passion of anger ; nor is there a surer mark of pride, or foundation for immoderate anger, than to be forward to give contradiction, and impatient to bear it.

If, therefore, we would effectually guard ourselves against this passion, we should search impartially, if we have no pride lurking in our hearts. Nor should we hastily conclude we have nothing to do with pride, because our condition is not high or splendid. Pride does not confine itself to splendor ; but nestles with low conditions. Nor should we think ourselves safe from it because our conduct hath nothing mainly reproachable in it, and that we behave with propriety towards others ; for the very reflection on our own good conduct will not only satisfy the conscience, which it should do, but, without great care, may nourish pride, which it should not do. It may increase our good opinion of ourselves, which once established, no matter on what, in proportion leads us to undervalue others, and consequently to bear with impatience whatever comes from them in opposition to our own sentiments. And in this search for pride in our hearts, we should not confine our enquiry to the great lines of our conduct or condition,
among

among the virtues and vices, which may distinguish us as good or bad men; we should look among the foibles, the humours, the oddities, of our hearts, and see whether pride may not be busy there. Pride, we know, is descended from the devil; and, as he once entered into a herd of swine, rather than he would be idle, so his offspring, pride, scruples not to enter into our maggots and humours; where it often makes men more assuming, and more impatient in matters of no worth, than in matters of the greatest importance. Wherever we find it, we must turn it out, and keep it out; and, in proportion as we advance in the habit of humility, we shall advance in the government of our anger. A modest opinion of ourselves is ever attended with a respectful opinion of others; and, both together, produce that moderation of temper in our conduct, on which alone we can promote the esteem of others, or our own satisfaction.

I say our own satisfaction—for, as the passions, whilst they are regulated by reason, serve well to the purposes of human nature, so, as soon as they get beyond that regulation, they counteract the purposes they were designed for. Thus pride, in a reasonable degree,

degree, may serve to maintain us in the duty of our station; but, unreasonably indulged, exposes us to numberless mortifications. This remark is strongly illustrated in the passionate man, whose anger is suggested by pride.—Into what mortifications does it betray him!—when he coolly reflects on the trifling occasion of it—when he considers the reason of the forbearance he has met with, which is no other than compassion for his weakness—and, when he is rendering the submission and recompense, which, perhaps, his outrage has obliged him to make!

If we consult reason and religion, in the government of our anger, we shall find,

1. That it never should appear upon *trifles*.
2. That, on other occasions, it should be *short*.
3. And that, when short, it should be *decent*.

1. The word *trifle*, indeed, is an indeterminate word; and, when we blame any one for being angry upon a trifle, we are commonly told—‘it may be a trifle in your judgment; but it is matter of importance in mine.’ But there is a certain measure for the real worth of things, however men may differ

differ in discovering or applying it; and, if weak minds have set a higher value upon any thing than it really has, they may truly say, indeed, it is matter of importance to them; but it is their own folly and weak judgment that has made it so. Their feeling that as a matter of importance, which has really none, is the very fault they are charged with; and, therefore, cannot be alledged in justification of itself. And, though some things are of different estimation with persons of different conditions, situation, and taste, yet there are many things, which all men judge and allow to be trifles, except those who are foolish enough to be angry about them; whose judgment, therefore, in this case, is not to be regarded, as being not only partial but singular. There is nothing so common, as for men to mistake their own sense of things for the common sense of mankind—which are oftentimes the most contrary things in the world; and we must, if we would be wise, submit sometimes to feel ourselves fools; and, when we find our own judgment opposed by the general judgment around us, and our *matter of the utmost importance* to be treated as the *utmost trifle*, it is no great modesty to suppose we may be wrong; but it is great folly to maintain

maintain the contrary, and especially to maintain it with anger.

To be fretful and passionate upon trifles, shews, indeed, more weakness than wickedness: very good men are sometimes so; but not very wise ones;—for nothing is more opposite to that greatness and constancy of mind, which distinguishes a wise man, than to be discomposed by trifles; for, where the mind is engaged on greater objects, as the mind of the wise man is, smaller objects pass unregarded; and the reason why some are discomposed by trifles is, because their heart and attention is set upon trifles, as being either unable or careless to think any higher. On which account, we should be exceeding jealous of discovering this weakness in us, when it carries such reproach with it; especially as we are Christians; who not only are able, but whose duty calls them to set their hearts and attention on things of much higher importance than the trifles which so much employ and discompose their thoughts. Attention, indeed, to the business and common duties of life, will help much to rectify this disorder, as we observe none to be more touchy than those who have least to do. But would men discharge their religious duty as they

they ought, they would feel themselves out of the reach of such discomposures of temper; for which, though they meet with excuse from others, they will hardly meet with their esteem. Would men, I say, in the discharge of their religious duty, carry their thoughts to the internal as well as the external work it sets us—would they seriously and habitually think of heavenly things, and order their hearts to the acquisition of real and true happiness, as they would, by this means, be qualified for keeping their temper in the great affairs of life, so they would not be apt to lose it among the trifles and fooleries of it. — Let those, then, who are liable to such weakness, remember, that to be angry about what is not worth a wise man's thought, shews want of sense; and, to be angry about what a Christian ought to despise, shews want of religion, as it shews, that their attention, instead of being fixed, where religion directs, on heavenly things, is fixed, not only on earthly things, but on the silliest of earthly things.

It may be said, perhaps, that in quick and violent tempers, a sudden provocation disables them from reasoning, and gives them no leisure to consult their religion; which *accounts* for their anger, but does not *excuse* it; and

is

is only a strong reason why persons of this temper should be constantly on their guard. They should frequently reflect on this blemish in their conduct, and, when no provocations are stirring, should coolly habituate themselves to make a right judgment of things, and consider trifles as trifles; as being scarce worth a thought, but certainly not worth maintaining it at the loss of their temper. They should frequently reflect on the objects religion sets before them—its precepts, its helps, its rewards; and be more attentive to the serious and useful calls of business, than to the idle calls of vanity—that fruitful parent of trifles—which weaken the mind, and spoil the judgment. In short, let them accustom themselves to think on such things as those ought to think of, who are endued with reason and religion, and accountable for both; and then, when any sudden provocations arise, they will have the aid of those principles ready at hand, and will not have it to *seek*, when they should have it to *apply*: by this means, they will be able to keep themselves from being put in a passion about trifles, which is by much an easier work, than it is to take down a passion when it is raised.

In

In short, business and religion are the best remedy against the malady we are considering. The best guard against being discomposed by trifles, is to be engaged in matters of importance; and, though it is not within every man's condition or abilities to be engaged in matters of importance belonging to this world, yet it is within every man's ability, and is his duty, to be engaged in what belongs to the next; the objects of which, when viewed with a religious eye, will make the most important objects of this world appear as trifles.—But, in truth, every station in life has its business and an importance belonging to it; and the more attentive any man is to the business of his station, the less liable will he be to be put out of humour by trifles; which certainly is a disease more incident to weak and disengaged minds, than it is to strong and busy ones.

This we may see verified by looking at the several stages of man's life; where we observe children and old people most apt to be angry upon trifles; the former being not yet qualified for the business of life, the latter being obliged to resign it; whilst, in the middle and active stage of life, when men have outgrown the weakness of childhood, and are not yet

§

fallen

fallen into the weakness of old-age, as their faculties are stronger and more employed, their temper is stronger and more steady, and not so apt to be pushed awry by every trifle that blows across them.—Not that this observation is uniformly and universally true; but, like other observations on human life, it admits of exception and variety, according to the various faculties and tempers of men. Some men are always children; and some, bodily decay excepted, are never old. Some are always touchy and peevish, with or without business; whilst others sit down, in the evening and repose of life, with the same cheerful even temper with which they enjoyed the vigour, and sustained the business of it. And such are to be admired—they shew a strength of soul, that is unconcerned in the decay of its tenement, which it is willing and prepared to quit; whilst weaker souls droop with the falling body, and seem as if they sat to be buried in its ruins.

Yet is the observation in general true, that childhood and old-age are most liable to be discomposed by little incidents.—The two extremities of human life, like the two extremities of a balance, are moved by a trifle, whilst the center is fixed and steady. And I will

venture

venture to leave it as a hint, which may have weight with some, that a touchy temper is always a disparagement, as it makes those who have it appear either younger or older, than perhaps they would care to be thought, as it shews, either that they have not yet outgrown their first childhood, or that they are hastening apace to their second.

The remaining topics on anger; namely, that it should be *short*, and that it should be *decent*, I beg leave to defer to the next opportunity.

venture to leave it as a thing which may have weight with some. There is a ready-made is always a disadvantage, as it makes those who have it appear either younger or older, than perhaps they would care to be thought, as it shows, either that they have not yet outgrown their first childishness, or that they are hastening on to their second.

The remaining topics of anger, vanity, that it should be few, and that it should be slow, I beg leave to leave to the next opportunity.

S E R M O N CXIII.

The same Subject continued.

EPHESIANS iv. 26.

*Be ye angry and sin not ; let not the sun go
down upon your wrath.*

IN my last discourse I observed, that, in the government of our anger, we must have recourse to Reason and Religion; which, if we attend to them, will tell us—that our anger should never appear upon *trifles*—that, on other occasions, it should be *short*—and that, on all occasions, it should be *decent*.

The first of these topics has been considered; where I observed, that to be angry upon trifles, shews both want of sense and, want of religion—that it is a disease most incident to weak and disengaged minds—and that the best remedy against it is, a constant attention to the business that is set us in this

life, and, especially, to that which belongs to the next.

2. But trifles are not the only occasions of anger; nor are they only weak and little minds that are subject to it. There are in life occasions of anger, of such nature, and such force, as will shake even strong and great minds. They are so many, and so well known, that I need not, in truth I cannot, recount them. In the government of our anger, when it arises on such occasions, reason advises, and religion commands, that it should be *short*. This the Apostle expressly points at in the latter words of my text — “Let not the sun go down upon your wrath.” Hasty anger may be the effect of a weak mind; but long anger seems to proceed from a bad one; and the same pride which hurries men into anger without reason, may carry them in it beyond duty, even where it is reasonable: on which occasions there are always pretences ready to justify resentment; which, however, if examined, are generally found to arise, either from something as bad as anger, if not worse, or from something not good enough to justify it.

The enormity of the offence is the grand plea on which men usually stand to justify
unrelenting

unrelenting anger ; and, though this enormity should have a fair judgment, yet it is seldom obtained. Every man claims to be judge of the offence he has received ; and yet he is the least qualified to be so : for, as he seeks to justify his own resentment by the enormity of the offence, he will strain every circumstance to set it forth, and be unwilling to look at any thing that may diminish it ; because whatever diminishes the offence reproaches his resentment. But admit the offence in the highest degree of provocation ; surely, an unforgiving temper is more offensive to God, than any provocation we can meet with from another is to ourselves ; and Christ has laid that stress upon the opposite duty, that, in the prayer he hath given us, he has made our forgiveness of others the condition, on which we are to ask and expect our own forgiveness from God ; nor is there any duty more strongly inculcated in his Gospel, or recommended by his own example, than the duty of forgiveness. This duty in the Gospel is carried so high, that it is with difficulty men attain to the practice of it ; not that the Gospel enjoins any thing more than what reason itself recommends ; for Christ, when he sets us this duty, does not place it on his own mere authority of enjoining

it; but on the natural reasonableness of the duty, on the natural obligation we are under of imitating God; whose blessings fall on the bad, as well as the good; whose kindness to the ungrateful plainly shews, that ingratitude is not, in itself, a reason for withholding kindness; and whose readiness in forgiving us, gives him a right to demand, that we should be ready to forgive each other. The Apostle St. Paul sets this duty on the natural utility attending it; as it is a means of softening and subduing our enemy. These reasons are much heightened by the interposition of Christ's example, and command, and in passing through the Gospel; for, if we are to practise this duty in imitation of God, much more are we to follow it in imitation of Christ; if the blessings of natural Providence call us to it, much more will the blessing of our redemption; and, if love and kindness shewn to an enemy will mollify the heart of a man, it will surely not find harder work in mollifying the heart of a Christian.

When, therefore, the Gospel carries the duty of forgiveness so high, that it commands us to love our enemies, and repay injuries with kindness, it is a height not so much above the reason, as it is above the
practice

practice, of mankind; and the cause of their defect in practice is, because self-love, especially when heightened by pride and other human passions, is more predominant in us, than a love for others; which we *see*, indeed, to be reasonable; but men will ever act by what they *feel*, sooner than by what they *see*; and will always find it difficult to set aside what they feel to be *natural*, to follow what is *reasonable*. Yet, to balance the difficulty of this duty, the Gospel hath set before us two the strongest motives for the observance of it, that can be proposed to rational creatures—the reward of God's favour, and happiness, for the performance of it; and the refusal of our own forgiveness, if we neglect it: so that, when men harbour long resentments in their breasts, and feed their minds with anger, they little regard their Christian profession and hopes; and as little do they consult their own safety, when they thus “give place to the devil;” that is, make room for him in their hearts, by furnishing them so fitly for his reception; who will enter, not only readily, but largely attended, with seven other spirits, who will make the state of such men much worse, and do them greater mischief, than they can execute on those they

are angry with. For, such brooding on anger, as it destroys the tranquillity of the mind, so it spoils its judgment, and sends it after false objects. Those of virtue and religion disappear, which are our only guides through life; and we are in constant danger, as well as constant uneasiness. So that, whatever just reasons others may give for our anger, we should not harbour long resentment for our own sakes: especially when we consider, that, whilst we are whetting our resentment against them, we are sharpening a severe sentence against our own souls—Forgive not, and be not forgiven!

This consideration should shorten our anger, and lead us to shew that forgiveness towards those who have offended us, which we all have occasion to ask of God, whom we daily offend, and who has confined the grant of our forgiveness to these terms. And, considering the uncertainty of life, that we may be summoned to our own account with God, whilst our account with an offending brother yet lies open, it will be wise not to delay it. Nor shall we make too much haste in this matter, if we follow the very letter of the Apostle's advice, and let our anger set with the same day's sun which saw it rise.—

We

We are made but for a short life ; and therefore are not made for long anger.—We have no right to lay out future time, even for the best purposes ; and therefore are grievously presumptuous, when we lay it out for the worst.—Our only business is with the present time, which we cannot employ better, than in providing for our present quiet and future happiness ; and how much it disturbs our study after these to have the heart burning with anger, and the head at work for revenge, any cool man may guess, and every warm man feels ; who is much cheated in the false and dangerous pleasure which revenge affords—as he finds, whenever he suffers himself to be led to the true and satisfactory pleasure which arises from a reconciliation.

3. Another step, which reason and religion leads us, in the government of anger, is—to have it *decent*.

Anger is very apt to hurry men into intemperance of speech and of behaviour. This they call giving vent to their anger ;—and, when it throws forth horrid oaths, and gross revilings, it is like the vent of a burning mountain, discharging its fiery contents to the annoyance, if not destruction, of what lies within its neighbourhood. This is so shocking

ing

ing an offence, that nothing need be said to expose it. We might well expect to meet with it no where but among the basest of mankind, who are destitute both of religion and humanity, and it is great pity when we meet with it any where else—among those who profess both;—who pay a costly sacrifice indeed to anger, when they give up both the Christian and the Gentleman in their indulgence of it. If they tell us, they cannot help such intemperance, it is not true; if they suppose it is polite, it destroys common sense; as well may they suppose poison to be wholesome food, as that what destroys the character of a gentleman is an accomplishment belonging to it. The general practice of it among those who bear that title, does not make it so;—for, if all who are called gentlemen, practised it, the conclusion would be, not that such intemperance is polite, but that there are no real gentlemen.

But the intemperance of speech and of behaviour, into which anger hurries men, is not confined to these enormous grossities. Severe reflections on the character of the offender, unjustly or unnecessarily urged, too often spring out of anger, and wound more deeply and extensively than abusive language; which
hurts

hurts only him who utters it. Men are the more easily hurried into this sort of intemperance, because it sometimes gratifies their wit as well as anger; two the most powerful incentives for making him uneasy, who has made us so. But this is neither justice nor prudence, that the anger raised on a single object should extend its effects among as many as it can reach for its gratification. This, indeed, is too commonly the case; for anger is like fire, makes the like havoc, and should with like diligence be restrained, as much as possible, to the object it begins with, and there, as soon as possible, extinguished. But it is not justice, that a single uneasiness received, should be repaid with the increase and severity of many: nor is it prudence; as by this means the party first offended becomes the greater transgressor, and the other party, who might have submitted to an anger, which he felt to be reasonable, thinks himself justified in employing his whole force against a bitter and indecent one; which, not content with giving just reproof, indulges itself in unjust, though smooth slander; a much worse evil than passionate anger, the effect of which may be short, and which, when left to itself, often evaporates; but when it is fed with
slander

slander and ill-nature, and proceeds, from the offence of a single action, to ravage a whole character, no matter how delicately, its mischief is lasting and incurable, and the behaviour not Christian, but savage. It is thus mutual resentments promote and strengthen each other, till, from an inconsiderable occasion of an inconsiderate passion, such mischiefs arise, as not only overwhelm the foolish combatants themselves, but endanger those around them.

To conclude.—Moderation of temper is the sovereign remedy of life, both for mind and body; when the spirits are active, but not restless; active to repel insult, but not restless to pursue mischief: the duty we owe ourselves requires the one, the duty we owe our neighbour forbids the other; which we cannot violate without hurting ourselves, if not in our external enjoyments (which, however, is generally the case) at least in the internal enjoyments we feel from a mind at ease, and the regard we meet with from those about us; — for passionate men may make themselves feared; but it is a moderate temper that procures esteem. In this situation the spirits flow even, and wear better, than when they are hurried between the two extremes of
passion

passion and remorse. Men have more command of their thoughts, and their thoughts have more command of them, when all is quiet within, and nothing threatens from without, than when all is tumult, and all is fear; in which situation men do not, they cannot, distinguish between right and wrong, between friends and foes. Besides this, a mind at ease has great effect in keeping the body so;—for, however different the natures of soul and body are, and however widely they will be separated, when one lies mouldering in the dust, and the other flies back to Him who gave it; yet, during their present connection, they mutually partake of each other's feelings; and the body fares the better or the worse, for a quiet or a turbulent soul within, as our houses do, for a riotous or a sober tenant.—This tenement of ours, at best and with fair usage, is not a durable one; it is not *built*, because it is not *designed*, for ages; but a passionate, turbulent soul, shortens its natural term in it—batters its walls—or sets it on fire—and turns itself out, over its ruins, before the time.

But the great advantage of a moderate temper is, that, in leading us to that ease and complacency which is the result of our social conduct,

conduct, it opens, through the same means, an introduction to the best discharge of our religious conduct; which must be more or less interrupted as these are wanting.

We cannot serve and love God as we ought, if we do not love one another, and accommodate ourselves, as far as we reasonably can, to each other. Where is there room for true devotion, or social duty, in a heart burning with anger? or, What merit is there in that devotion, whether at church or in the closet, when men only put aside their resentments at kneeling down, and resume them at rising up? Christ says—"First be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift."—This shews what stress Christ lays on forgiveness and moderation of temper; that God is ready even to suspend the duty we owe to him, till we have first discharged that we owe to our brother; which is here made a necessary qualification for a proper discharge of our devotion to God:—Nor is there a more effectual qualification for the whole discharge of Christian duty, than moderation of temper; which, as it keeps men cool under the offences they meet with from each other, sets them in a manner above this world; and the higher we feel ourselves placed above this world, the

Quibus I better

better prospect we have of the next; and the more at liberty we are to attend the direction of religion in leading us to it. We readily fall into its work of preparing ourselves for it, and, turning our attention from the offences which others give us, to our own offences against God, we find ourselves so much engaged to recollect and remove the latter, that we have no leisure, no thought, for remembering, much less for resenting, the former. —In this situation, we feel such comfort in our communications with God, and the thoughts of his friendship, that we smile at the enmity of the world, and, though pleased, are not enamoured with its favours. —Thus passing, as smoothly as we can, through this troublesome pilgrimage, and putting aside the offences, which cross our path, with a gentle hand, we follow the sacred steps of religion to the mansions of bliss;—where our mild and patient Redeemer receives us as his own, and we are admitted to sit down with the Lamb of God in everlasting peace and happiness.

better perfect we have of the power and the
 most liberty we are possessed in the nation
 of religion in leading us to it. We naturally
 fall into the work of preparing ourselves for it
 and, turning our attention from the offences
 which others give us to our own offences
 against God, we find ourselves to much en-
 gaged to reflect and remove the latter, than
 we have no feeling no thought for reforming
 being much less for removing the former.
 — In this situation we feel less compassion in
 our communications with God, and the
 thoughts of his fatherly love, than we find in
 the charity of the world, and strongly affected
 are not commended with its favour. — Thus
 passing as frequently as we can, through this
 providence of punishment, and passing aside the
 objects, which excite our pain, with a gentle
 hand, we follow the latest steps of religion
 to the mansions of bliss; — where our mind
 and patient Redeemer receive us as his own,
 and we are admitted to sit down with the
 Lamb of God in everlasting peace and hap-
 piness.

S E R M O N CXIV.

ON THE DUTY OF RELIGIOUS
REFLECTION.

P s A L M cxix. 59.

*I thought on my ways, and turned my feet
unto thy statutes.*

THE Psalmist here, by his own example, recommends a duty well worth our notice and imitation—the duty of religious reflection.

This duty is not discharged by a mere general reflection that we are sinners; which is but a momentary act of the mind, and is as ineffectual as it is transient. The most hardened sinners often feel this reflection forcing itself upon them; and their hardness lies in this, that, though they feel themselves forced to think thus far, they will not chuse to think any farther.

The work of religious reflection is a work of more time; and, at first view, has very much the appearance of a difficult, disagreeable, and frightful work: for which reasons we are very apt to decline undertaking it, or to falter in our execution of it: but the more we feel ourselves afraid of this work, the greater need is there for our setting about it; for it is with our spiritual, as with our worldly accounts, when men are afraid to look into them, it is a sure sign they are bad. This leads many into distress; and, I fear, too many to the grave, without a suitable preparation for it; for in this, as well as in other important circumstances, "the children of this world are, in their generation, wiser than the children of light." Though many are ruined, through fear of looking into their accounts, yet we see more surmounting this fear, to save their temporal good, who yet submit to it at the hazard of their eternal welfare.

All the difficulty and disagreeableness of this work arises from the neglect of it; we set about it late, and find it difficult and disagreeable to look on days that are passed; because we have neglected to look at them as they passed; as men, who neglect to keep their
current

current accounts clear, find more difficulty in stating them at last.

Yet, notwithstanding the apparent difficulty or disagreeableness of this work, resolution and perseverance will shew us comfort and advantage arising from it. The Psalmist shews us the general good effect arising from it—"I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy statutes."

If this duty leads to a reformation of life, wicked men have the strongest reason to set about it; and when we find even the holy Psalmist declaring himself the better for it, good men will not think themselves unconcerned in it; for, though they may not want reformation, they may, however, want improvement, which is best procured by religious reflection, and is hardly to be procured without it.

Under this double advantage then, of reforming the bad, and improving the good, the duty of religious reflection becomes a general duty, and offers itself to the observation of all.

The short and only rule, in applying ourselves to this duty, is what we find laid down to us in the first exhortation to the communion.—It cannot be laid down in better

words—that ‘ we examine our lives and conversations by the rule of God’s commandments ; and whereinfoever we shall perceive ourselves to have offended, either by will, word, or deed, there to bewail our own sinfulness, and to confess ourselves to Almighty God, with full purpose of amendment of life.’

In reflecting on our past conduct, we are to look at that rule, which Christ hath given us to walk by ; his precepts, his promises, his threatenings, as they are laid down to us in the Gospel.—This is the rule, by which Christ will judge us ; and, therefore, it is the rule by which we should examine and judge ourselves.

We should not make the fashion and judgment of the world the rule, by which we are to judge of our moral and religious conduct. The world excuses many things, which Christ’s Gospel condemns ; and, whoever carries his reflections upon himself no farther than to enquire, how far he meets with the approbation or reproach of men, is not only short, but may be very wrong, in his reflections, and may be deceived to sit down contented, not only without doing what he ought, but after doing what he ought not.

In

In the work of religious reflection, our business with the world is not to consider how we may be judged by it, but how we have used it. The world is not our judge; it is not so much as the rule of our duty; it is but the means through which we apply ourselves to what is the true rule of our duty; and, by the right use of which, we may approve ourselves to him, who is the true judge of our conduct.

The world has no more ability, than it has right, to judge us; it can only judge us by appearances, and upon comparison; and this makes so many of us study to save appearances, and to be content with the comparative merit of being better than some others about us; for it is natural to guide our conduct by the nature of the judgment we submit to: from seeing the world judge by appearances, we quickly learn to live by appearances; and those who are loth to look beyond the judgment of the world, must be sensible how easily they may impose upon it; which is the very reason they are so ready to be determined by it.—But it may not be—there is a higher judge, who will pass a stricter judgment on our behaviour, who “seeth not
“as man seeth;” but “trieth the heart;” and

who will approve or condemn us, not according as we are better or worse than others, but according as we have neglected or fulfilled the duty he hath set before us.

In the work, therefore, of religious reflection, we must turn our attention from the judgment of the world, with which, in this matter, we have nothing to do, and look into our own consciences; the judgment we meet with there, upon comparing our conduct with our true rule of duty, may be worth our attention, as it is a foretaste of the judgment we shall meet with hereafter. If our hearts condemn us in this examination, it will be of no weight or comfort to us, that the world acquits us; which, in many cases, is ready to exact less of us than our duty requires, and where it does not, is most easily deceived.

Yet, in this inward search of our own consciences lies, perhaps, the worst part of the difficulty. We are almost as ignorant of ourselves as the world may be ignorant of us. We are as ready to lower the demands of duty, as the world can be to indulge us in it; and we are as busy to deceive ourselves, as we are to deceive the world about us. These circumstances, then, in our condition, call for two
very

very necessary things in the work of religious reflection—they are *diligence*, and *impartiality*.

We are ignorant of many things in our past conduct. Some faults, as they may make but small impression when they are committed, are not laid up to be remembered; others stay longer, but escape at last; and some there are, which the mind is industrious to turn out of its repository—yet all must be provided for by serious repentance. This, therefore, calls for diligence in a survey of our past conduct.

Whoever sets about this work, will find his inability in making a compleat review of all his offences before God, and will have reason to cry out with the Psalmist—“ Who can
“ tell how oft he offendeth? O cleanse thou
“ me from my secret faults.” There will be occasion, I say, for this reflection and petition, even after the most diligent examination we can make of ourselves; which is a reason, not for discouraging our attempts, but for increasing our diligence in the work; lest, to the number of those offences which we cannot recollect, we add the much worse number of others, which we will not recollect; in behalf of which we cannot, with any propriety, use the Psalmist’s petition, and ask to be

cleansed from our secret faults; which may well be meant of such faults as we cannot find, but not of such as we will not look for.

The imperfection of our faculties will hide many of our sins from our view; yet, upon a diligent enquiry, we shall find ourselves able to recollect more than we care to look at. We shall find ourselves able to recollect our more eminent and grievous transgressions; these we are not so unable as we are unwilling to recollect.—Yet why unwilling? the horror we feel on this occasion, if we rightly consider, lies not so much in entering upon such recollection, as in avoiding it; for there is no horror in recollecting our past sins, whilst it is yet in our power, whether they shall hurt us or not; and this is in our power, so long as we have opportunity of applying for pardon to the mercy of Christ, with true repentance and full purpose of amendment; and, surely, there is no horror in applying to the mercy of Christ for that pardon, which he is both able and ready to bestow, and which he has promised to grant. Lastly, where is the horror in forming full purposes of a better course of life, after a sincere repentance and distaste for the former?

Our

Our sins thus provided for, and a diligent though imperfect search made into our past lives, we may venture to beg of God, that he would forgive us our negligences and ignorances; such failures in our duty as have not followed from a love or habit of sin; but which the frailty of human nature hath led us both to commit and to forget. Such failures, though they have escaped our notice, yet deserve our care; for, being real offences against God, they do not lose their guilt, because we lose sight of them, but must be provided for as such. And even in this part of our work, though we cannot do all, yet it is owing to our indolence that we do so little as we do; for I doubt it may with more truth be said, that we hide our faults, than that we cannot find them.—However, we should do what we can in this matter, and do it sincerely; which will not only help us to more discovery than we are aware of, but will give us a better title to God's mercy for such as we cannot discover. After using our best strength, God will excuse our weakness; but to put our plea wholly upon the latter, without applying the former, is wrong and presumptuous. To beg of God to cleanse us from our secret faults, will be of no amount, whilst our open sins stand

SERMON

stand unthought and unrepented of; and to think that God will grant us his pardon for the latter, whilst we will not give ourselves the pains to recollect them, is an expectation, if not too much for the mercy of God, yet vastly too much for the unworthiness of man.

In short, and to conclude—In your religious reflection, “seek, and ye will find”—both sins and mercies—Knock, and the door of salvation shall be opened to you—Kneel, and be forgiven.

S E R M O N CXV.

The same Subject continued.

P S A L M cxix. 59.

*I thought on my ways, and turned my feet
unto thy statutes.*

BESIDES diligence in recollecting our offences, we should use honesty and impartiality in judging of them.

We are apt, not only to shorten the number of our offences, by taking no notice of many, but also to mitigate the guilt of those which remain, by taking too favourable a notice of them. We are very fond of setting down many of our offences under the title of trivial ones. It is very true, our offences are not all equal; but we should be very careful how we accustom ourselves to think any of them not worth our notice, which is the usual consequence of making
this

this distinction ; for we call some offences trivial, not meaning that less care or less repentance is due for them, but that they deserve none ; which is manifestly wrong, if they are offences, and which draws this pernicious effect after it—that, by accustoming ourselves to esteem trivial offences as nothing, we learn to esteem great ones as less than they are.

We should always remember, that, as God hath given us the faculty of judging our behaviour, so he has given us the rule by which we are to judge it ; and that, whilst he leaves us to judge ourselves, he does not exclude his own judgment over us ; but directs ours to be governed by it. The judgment we make of ourselves is not our final judgment ; but is subordinate to his judgment, which will be so, and is no farther a safe judgment, than as it agrees with that ; and this is known by its agreement with that rule of duty which he hath set us.

Whenever, therefore, we are inclined to judge favourably of our offences, as we must be sensible that we are not the only judges of the matter, so we should be suspicious, whether our own judgment will agree with His, who is above us. This will, of course, send

us

us to examine the judgment we make by that rule of duty which is laid before us. Whatever part of our conduct disagrees with that, is an offence; and, as such, must be provided for by true repentance: nor will it be of any amount to call it a trivial offence, if, by giving it such title, we mean to excuse ourselves from repenting of it; for, though in other respects our offences greatly differ from each other, yet they all agree in this respect, that they all require repentance and amendment.

But we are apt, besides judging favourably of our offences, to judge favourably of ourselves, and to make ourselves easy with our reflections on our wrong behaviour, under the notion that we are frail, weak, and imperfect creatures. This is very true; but can never be admitted as, of itself, sufficient to excuse our offences, without a sincere repentance and amendment. For, weak as we are, we are capable of doing what God expects from us; and, though it be true, that we fail of a constant steady obedience, and that the cause of this failure lies in the frailty of our nature; yet the pardon of it must lie, not there, but somewhere else—namely, in that appointment which God hath set for
the

the pardon of all our offences, through the merits of Christ, upon our sincere repentance.

With this appointment before us, it is absurd to think, that the frailty of our nature is, of itself, sufficient pardon for our offences; for why then has God thought fit to appoint another method or reason for pardoning them; and, having appointed another method, what occasion have we to lay hold on the frailty of our nature, as a plea for pardon, when we may, if we please, lay hold on a much better of God's providing? Nay, rather, what affront is it to the goodness of God, and how dangerous for ourselves, when God has appointed a remedy for our frailty, to expect, that our frailty itself, without that remedy, shall sufficiently plead for us?

We should, therefore, be cautious how we depend upon that, as an excuse for our bad conduct, which is but the cause of it. The frailty of our nature is a reason of complaint; but no reason of justification: it is a very bad reason for being indifferent about past offences; but a very good one for being more cautious in our conduct for the future.

But there is still another step, by which we are very apt to deceive ourselves in the
work

work of religious reflection—which is, by vain arguments of our own, about the nature and merit of such actions as we are desirous to excuse, because we are loth to give them up. Some part of our conduct, a favourite part, lies open to exception, and, upon comparing it with the express directions of Christ's Gospel, it appears to be wrong—we presently wish it were allowable, and as presently set ourselves at work to make it so—we reason about it—as we call it; that is, we search for all the fallacies our wit can suggest, to conceal or disguise what we do not care to look at; it is natural to believe as we wish, and we soon bring ourselves to believe such conduct allowable, as really calls for repentance and amendment.—But what is all this? Has Christ set a rule of duty before us, and strictly enjoined our observance of it, and, after all, are we obliged to observe it only so far as we judge to be reasonable?—that is, in short, only so far as we feel agreeable to us; for reason there can be none in attempting to make that allowable which Christ hath forbid. Men may pervert themselves, and puzzle others, by such vain attempts; but the truth still lies open to the

honest understanding. Christ's commands are plain things ; facts in conduct are plain things ; whether the facts agree or disagree with the commands may be plainly seen ; — if they disagree, not all the subtle reasoning in the world can ever make them agree, or, can set aside the necessity of repentance and amendment.

One thing should never be forgot, which yet, perhaps, is not often remembered, in the work of religious reflection ; which is, to reflect, not only where we have done amiss, but where we have omitted doing well ; to consider the means of virtue we have neglected, as well as the means of vice which we have applied, and to take the goodness and forbearance of God into consideration, as well as our own sinfulness and obstinacy. — These are circumstances, which, though they aggravate our account, must yet be taken into it, to make it a true account.

For we are placed here, not only under a prohibition against sin, but also under a command to pursue goodness ; and God hath set before us the suitable means for such a work, as his mercy both gives and prolongs the opportunities of applying them. These must be

part

part of our account; these are talents committed to our trust, which must be returned improved.

Doubtless it aggravates the sinner's account, that, in proportion as he has been following the wages of sin, he has wasted the talents of righteousness committed to him; and that he has not only despised the authority, but the mercy, of God:—and, as this aggravates his account, so it heightens the necessity of his repentance and reformation; unless we think it indifferent with how great an account on our heads we stand before the tribunal of Christ.

It is surely right to diminish our account, before we are called there; and, in proportion as we find it a heavy one, to be the more speedy and anxious for lightening it, by a timely repentance and reformation.

Nor is it less suitable that we should have recourse to this duty then, when we have occasion to look up for his assistance under any present state of difficulty and danger; it being as presumptuous in sinners, impenitently such, to ask and expect God's blessings, as it is, not to be afraid of his judgments. In our present state, we have great reason to ask God's assistance against our enemies; and that

he would blast those purposes, which, should they ripen to event, would prove a judgment upon us, too heavy for our heads, though not too heavy for our sins. In proportion as we want Divine assistance, we should qualify ourselves for asking it; and our qualification must be the same which David had recourse to, when he sought the favour of God—we must “think on our ways, and turn our feet unto his statutes.”—Whether we look around us, within our own breasts, there is enough to think of; and we are gone so far astray from God’s statutes, that, upon turning our feet towards them, we must take many steps to recover them.

Our cause is good; and, if we make ourselves so, we shall assuredly find God so. But this is not to be done by lamenting the general wickedness of the times;—a lamentation, which every one is ready to join, without considering how much he himself contributes towards making them so. Lamentation has no effect; nor has repentance a sufficient one, without reformation; which must be brought about, not by reproaching others; but by each one’s amendment of himself.—This, indeed, is a work, the compleat performance of which we may not expect from the perverseness and obstinacy of

of man ; but, such is the goodness and mercy of God, that the *few* who sincerely turn themselves to him shall prevail, for averting those judgments which, but for their sakes, would fall on the *many* who will not turn and seek after God. — Ten righteous men, had they been found in it, would have saved Sodom. God, in the dispensation of his providence, often withholds his judgments on the wicked, from a regard to the good, who are mixed among them ; and suffers the tares to continue, because he will not root up the wheat with them ; thus encouraging the good, whilst, at the same time, he allows the wicked opportunity for their repentance.

Notwithstanding the general wickedness, dissipation, and inattention to religion, which, it must be owned, do strongly mark the present times, yet there are many among us, who love and fear God, and attend to his religion, though there may be more who neglect, perhaps despise, both : and, though there are many among us, who are busy in contriving, and would rejoice in effecting, the ruin of their country ; who, with the malice of disgusted ambition, first bring war to our gates, and then treacherously obstruct the success of it ; yet we have those, and enough of them,

300 *On the Duty of, &c.* Serm. 115.

them, who love their country, and have both courage and integrity to stand forth in its defence.

Let us hope, then, that, for the sake of those among us who love God and their country, the Almighty will lift up himself to our assistance on this occasion—that he will strengthen the hands of those, whose hearts are ready in our defence, and give us the blessing of success—reserving his judgments for those who are disposed to betray us:—and, let us trust, that, if we diligently seek him, and turn our feet unto his statutes, God will still say to our Sion, “I am thy salvation,” and to those who love his name—“Be strong, and establish your hearts, all ye who trust in the Lord.”

P I N T S,



